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FATE AT THE DOOR



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FATE AT THE DOOR

By

Jessie Van Zile Belden

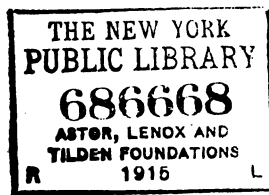
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“At Karachi, India, suddenly, January 10, 189—, John Strathmore, aged fifty-one.”

JOHN STRATHMORE was my best friend. Many who knew him marvelled at his return to India, for he was a man who did not give his word lightly, and he had said that his wandering days were over.

I think that I and one other are the only ones who know the truth. The facts came into my possession by a curious chance,—a chance that would make a story in itself. Now that he is gone and the other one, who was most interested, is living in a far country, I feel that it is not a breach of confidence to tell the story of his last winter in New York.

THEY WERE
BORN
WARRIORS

FATE AT THE DOOR.

CHAPTER I.

“His life was gentle ; and the elements
So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, this was a man !”

It was late in November. The Court-landts were on the eve of a prolonged trip to the Pacific coast, and Mrs. Cabot was receiving the guests she had asked to meet them,—a farewell dinner-party of friends.

As she stood in the mellow radiance of the wax candles in her drawing-room, with her soft black eyes and hair and her clear olive skin, she well deserved her title of “the Spanish beauty.” A hundred years before a Lewiston had married a Spanish woman, and in each succeeding generation some one person had inherited the beauty

of the Andalusian. The guests, with one exception, had all arrived, and it wanted but a few minutes of the hour.

The hostess was saying to Mrs. Courtlandt, "Did I tell you, Beatrice, that you would meet John Strathmore to-night?"

"You did mention his coming," said Mrs. Courtlandt. "Ernest has a great opinion of him. What is he like? rather a formidable person?"

"He used to scare me a little," replied Mrs. Cabot, "but I don't think you will be much in awe of him. You know, Beatrice, you are considered to be very clever yourself, and I am going to ask him to take you out. He has been abroad for a long time, and this is one of his rare visits."

As she finished her sentence the footman announced "Mr. Strathmore."

As he came forward and greeted his hostess, Mrs. Courtlandt noticed that he was of rather distinguished appearance, and that his manner was singularly straightforward and composed. There

were lines of gray in his hair, which at the temples was almost white, but the rather long moustache, trimmed at the lips and lighter than his hair, showed no encroachments.

"It is not a handsome face," she thought, "but it looks strong and trustworthy." And as Mrs. Cabot said, "Mrs. Courtlandt, let me present Mr. Strathmore," she met the direct glance of a pair of gray eyes which seemed for an instant to grasp and hold her own.

"You will take Mrs. Courtlandt out," said Mrs. Cabot, as the butler announced dinner.

Some exacting business had kept Strathmore on his feet all day, and he was both tired and hungry enough to look forward with justifiable satisfaction to a comfortable chair and the good food and wine for which Mrs. Cabot's table was notable. An unexceptionable dinner, in the company of thoroughly congenial and agreeable people, is not, on the whole, a very frequent experience with any one anywhere,

no matter how often he may dine ; but as he seated himself by the side of the graceful, perfectly dressed woman whom he had taken out, and surveyed the exquisitely appointed table, glowing in the soft light, the bank of ferns and orchids in the centre, the subdued sparkle of colored glass, and the gleam of silver from a few pieces of curious old plate, he felt that this was one of the occasions when all the conditions of success seemed likely to be fulfilled.

He had, in his day, dined with thorough enjoyment off a handful of dates and a few mouthfuls of warmish water ; off bread and grapes and a bit of thin wine ; off bread and cheese and a draught of beer ; but none the less could he appreciate the good things of the civilized world.

There were but twelve at table : the Courtlandts ; Mr. and Mrs. Tom Blaik ; Mr. and Mrs. George Overton ; Mr. John Percival Young, whom all his friends and the rest of the world knew as " Jack ;" a

Mrs. Wheeler, an attractive and rather clever woman, with a reputation for saying sharp things ; and a not too young young-woman, Kate Sear by name, whom he had not met before, but who seemed on familiar terms with all the party. Strathmore knew the men, but he was not on specially familiar terms with any of them, owing to his rare and brief returns to his own country. His last absence had lasted three years. But he had known Ernest Courtlandt from boyhood, and, though he was some years the elder, and had used to regard Ernest as almost a boy, they were now, to all intents, of an age ; and both men liked to feel that their friendship—if so it might be called—was of long standing.

Mrs. Courtlandt had come to New York as a bride six years before, but had been abroad during one of his brief visits and in mourning at another time. He was interested to meet her, not only as Ernest's wife, but as one who had been described to him as both beautiful

and clever to an unusual degree. He recalled a meeting with Jack Young in the morning and what had passed between them. There had been some desultory remarks, and then Jack *loquitur*, "Expect to meet you to-night at the Cabots'. Elected to fill vacancy: Wheeler's out of town. Ernest Courtlandt and his wife going to California; dinner to-night to see 'em off.

"You've not met Mrs. Courtlandt? No? Well, she's awfully handsome and all that, and clever, too,—reads all the books and can talk about 'em. Goes in for music,—Wagner, and all that sort of thing, you know. Fact is, she's rather too much for most of us fellows: admiration at a d-distance, you know. Oh, yes, civil enough; and once in a while makes you think you're getting along first-rate; but if you think you'll make a little running on the st-strength of it, she's got a way of sort of asking a question or something like that, and makes you f-feel as if you'd been b-brought up in a s-saw-mill

and only shook it d-day before yesterday. Fellows all admire her im-m-mensely, but don't get too close to the cage—excuse the French—m-more than once. Should think you'd like her though, and should think she might take to you. You can go in on foreign parts and languages and all that. Beg pardon. Well, no. Ernest isn't much better off than the rest of us on those matters, but I suppose a man's wife doesn't expect him to be very w-way-up. Gets used to him, I expect, and k-keeps him round on other accounts; h-hope mine will, any way. Well, good-by. See you to-night."

But Master Jack did not appear to be particularly abashed when he found his place at table on Mrs. Courtlandt's left hand, and said, while seating himself (the little stammer with which he was afflicted—or which he affected—did not always appear, and hence his detractors maintained the latter theory), "I'm p-playing in great luck to-night!" and to her hope that "he was going to be properly be-

haved," replied that "he was prepared to beat the record."

"I heard that you were in Washington, Mr. Young," said Mrs. Overton, "looking after the welfare of the State."

"Yes," said he, "I h-heard that myself, and I knew the m-minute I heard it that it wasn't so."

Beyond the few murmured words of acknowledgment upon Strathmore's introduction to Mrs. Courtlandt, neither had spoken to the other, and, though not a shy man, he felt an odd reluctance to be the first to speak. He ate his oysters and sipped his glass of Chablis in silence. Since coming to the table, and despite the talk and laughter going on about, there had come to him a queer feeling that he was living over a part of the past, and as he glanced at his companion, who had half turned to reply to something of Jack Young's, he seemed to remember the characteristic line of her throat and cheek, as if at some remote time in his life, or in another life—somewhere—he had sat be-

side this same woman as he was sitting then, and that she been very much to him. The feeling vanished, however, as she turned her face to him and spoke.

"I believe, Mr. Strathmore," she said, "that you have been deliberately waiting for me to begin the conversation. You know it is inevitable that we should talk to each other more or less under the circumstances."

"Yes," he said. "Is that intended for an encouragement or a reproof? In either case I must admit that you are right. I am so anxious to begin our acquaintance rightly—you see I am taking it for granted—that I have waited for you to give me a clue."

"And have I given you one?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "in a way, you have. You divined my thought so accurately that I shall expect you to estimate me equally; and while you put me at my ease, you also put me on my guard."

"Ah, then," was her comment, "if that

be so, it does not argue well for the progress of the acquaintance which you desire so much to promote. And indeed," she went on, "you know we start to-morrow for California,—I am not sure for how long, but probably for some months. My husband is privately under the impression that there are a number of things the matter with him which a change will remedy; but the ostensible reason for our journey is to prolong my existence. So you see that unless you can endure your own country for a longer time than, as I understand, you usually stay, I am afraid that our acquaintance will begin and end at Mrs. Cabot's table."

"Where is my own country?" he said, as if to himself, "and why should I stay in it?"

"There is a note of reproach in what you say."

"Do you think a man ought always to live in a place because he happened to be born in it? I am a man almost utterly without ties. I belong to nobody and no-

body belongs to me. There is a line of an old doggerel song which describes me, 'He's a poor devil that nobody owns.' I am 'out of business,' as the saying is,—at least I have sedulously tried to keep out of it for years ; and while I am not, of course, entirely without occupations, my whimsies will work as well abroad as here, in fact better. Though, for the matter of that, they may be left out of consideration, because I think they will never help or hinder any one but myself. If, however, it will raise your estimate of me, I may say that I am in my own country this time for a practical purpose ; and though when I first found that it would take some months to accomplish it I rebelled exceedingly, I am beginning to find that I am a better American than I supposed."

"But," she interposed, "I had an idea that you had a good many friends here."

"Yes," he said, "I am rather surprised to find how many. I did not expect or deserve to keep in touch with my old friends, and perhaps I am not quite—yet ;

but their kindness and readiness to take me in touch and please me very deeply. It may turn out that I shall get to feel that I do belong somewhere,—yes, here, after all,—and that my wanderings will grow briefer until they cease altogether. The great difficulty is that America is no place for an idle man.”

“I should not think that difficulty insuperable,” she said.

“Oh,” he replied, “you know what I mean. The people that I know are, in many ways, almost too European ; but the men all work,—that is the rule, at least.”

“There are Ernest and Jack Young,” she said, with a smile.

“Yes,” he said, “there is Jack, to be sure ; but I’m not so young as Jack.”

“Do I hear a voice of m-melody b-breathing my d-dulcet name?” inquired Jack, as he finished the last morsel of an achievement in fish known only to Mrs. Cabot’s *chef*.

“I mentioned you to Mr. Strathmore as the typically industrious American,”

said Mrs. Courtlandt, "'who scorns delights and lives laborious days.'"

"Ah, Mrs. Courtlandt," said he, "you are the only b-being—with an 'upper-case' B—who has divined my d-deepest possibilities and with subtly sympathetic insight has detected the secret of my existence. I know I am supposed by those to whom I vouchsafe but a f-fleeting disclosure of one of the many sides of my complex character to be an incorrigible b-b-butterfly. But, really, I'm a very b-busy man."

Mrs. Courtlandt made a little contemplative cut into the *paté* on her plate, and said, without looking up, "Yes, I understand; but is there nothing but money-making to be done?" She paused a moment as if in hesitation.

"Well?" said Strathmore, tentatively.

"You said," she resumed, "that there was a note of reproach in what I said. I don't think I intended it, and yet there may have been."

"My half-waked conscience may have

dreamed it," he suggested, smiling. "Pray go on," he said, as she seemed doubtful of her topic.

"I do feel," she said,—“I speak as a woman,—that a man is born of his country as he is born of his mother. Whatever else, he is her child and hers only. Surely there is that to be done in this country of ours, working out its salvation in fear and trembling, worthy any man's endeavor, and of his in particular who has brains and conscience and money enough to make him free to serve her—this mother of his. You have been much in England?”

"Yes," he replied; "you make me reluctant to admit it, but there are more houses in England where I am sure of welcome than here. Well?"

"Then you know," she went on quickly, "that a large majority of the House of Commons is made up of cadets or accredited representatives of the great families of England, distinguished by lineage or great wealth, or both: men who are in

politics for fame and principle ; and who, liberal or conservative, as the case may be, can be trusted to serve their common country honestly and loyally according to their light."

"That is quite true," said Strathmore, "and it is very fine. You may understand that it is just such things and possibilities which make me fond of England and English people. It seems as if some part of the old feudal feeling still survives, and that these men are made legislators because they are gentlemen, not in despite of the fact. I do not mean to imply that there are no gentlemen in public life here,—in politics, in fact ; but our democratic ideas are in some ways so very radical as to induce a sort of snobishness quite as unadmirable as that which toadies to rank in Great Britain. I should not wish to consider myself nor yet to be considered as 'holier than thou ;' but if my desire to serve my country were ever so great, I simply should not know how to set about it.

Perhaps I might try to find out though," he added, thoughtfully, after an interval.

He looked up and met her straight regard. The hazel-brown eyes were very soft and yet very bright, and her glance seemed to go into his heart with a corporal sensation.

She looked away almost instantly, and the color came faintly into her face as she said, "Forgive me if I have said or implied too much. You know I told you that I spoke as a woman, and we women feel too much and know too little. I should not like to think that I have been presuming to teach you your duty."

"Ah, Mrs. Courtlandt," was his reply, "revelation is the utmost and ultimate means of knowledge, and I am most humbly and sincerely your debtor."

"Champagne, sir?" said a familiarly British voice at his ear. "Sweet or dry, sir?"

"Dry, please," he answered, and watched the wine cream in the tall decorated glass, a fashion which Mrs. Cabot

was reviving, rather against her husband's views.

The dinner had gone on in perfect sequence: the victory in fish a triumph of an *entrée*, *relevé* and so on, and Strathmore had contented himself to take the good things as they came to a hungry man, listening to the talk and badinage, which waxed in volume and vivacity as the well-trained serving-men went round with napkined bottles. The roast was set in front of the host, and at his nod of approval taken to the side.

"Saddle of venison, sir?" said the same voice.

"Their voices are alike everywhere," he thought, as he said, "Yes, please;" and, smiling to himself at an old joke about "sticking to the saddle," wondered if the etiquette of his native land would permit a second cut.

Although the dinner was given for the Courtlandts, he was seated at the left of his hostess, between her and Mrs. Courtlandt, whom he had taken out. He had

said but little to Mrs. Cabot or she to him ; for, though she had a justifiable confidence in her cook and her butler, she still could not altogether divest herself of the responsibility of commander-in-chief. But now everything was in well-ordered swing.

Strathmore remembered her as a slim slip of a girl, one of a numerous family in quite moderate circumstances and with small opportunity to acquire the tastes and manners of "society." She had married a man twenty years her senior, rich and admiringly fond of her, and had passed the ten years of her married life in serene enjoyment of her gowns and jewels and all the good things in which her soul rejoiced.

She had a small genius for affairs, and every appointment of house and equipage was as perfect as money and good taste could make them. Her table was famous, and she relished the good things thereof as much herself as any epicure who delighted her with discriminating praise.

Caring nothing for books, she had small knowledge of their contents, and an unconquerable terror of the water had prevented her travelling except in her own country. Nevertheless, long association with well-bred and well-informed people had educated her to the point at least of listening well and saying her (always good-natured) nothings in particular with a certain adroitness. (There was a story that Jack Young had once undertaken, on a wager, to make her believe that Thackeray was a Roman general, and had lost, because she had never heard of Thackeray and knew little of Rome ; but he persistently denied it.)

She had been placidly enjoying her dinner, replying on occasion to the small talk which came to her, and particularly to the badinage of Ernest Courtlandt at her right. There came a little lull in the general conversation. Turning to Strathmore, she said, in rather a high-pitched voice, which was one of the least of her attractions, "So glad to hear, Mr. Strath-

more, that you are thinking of spending the winter. Don't you think you could make up your mind to settle down for good? With all the men you know you could easily find some business to do, and among us"—she smiled very archly—"I'm sure we could find some nice girl for a wife for you."

From across the table he caught, from a pair of very quizzical light-blue eyes, a glance of intense repressed amusement, and for an instant he felt the blood mount to his face. But he answered his hostess with a quiet smile, his eyes upon the glass, which he was turning by its stem between his fingers, "You are exceedingly kind, I am sure, Mrs. Cabot. I shall be here longer than usual, in any case ; but about settling down, I don't know. I am afraid I should not fall in very readily with the business part of your suggestion, and I am sure that if any one were to take me for a partner, I should surprise him considerably at times,—most times, in fact. And"—looking up at her with a slight

laugh—"I am also afraid that the other partnership you suggest is even more out of my line. You would be grieved to know how many nice girls have declined the advantages of being Mrs. Strathmore."

"Oh, now, Mr. Strathmore," she replied, with a small giggle, "you know I can't believe that! I'm sure you don't look old in the least, even if your hair is getting a little gray, and I'm sure there are lots of girls—— Don't you think every man ought to have a wife to sort of look after him and make him comfortable, and all that sort of thing?"

"Quite so, madam," he replied, "if he *have* one."

Before the puzzled little frown which his rejoinder excited had left her face his host created a diversion by calling to him, "I say, Strathmore, you know about wines. Can you tell me what champagne you are drinking?"

"I know that it is exceedingly good," he replied, putting his glass to his lips,

"and of a dryness rare to find. I am puzzled to give it a name, however, for I am not aware that the wine it exactly resembles has a market here."

"What's that?" said Mr. Cabot, greatly interested.

"If I were abroad," said Strathmore, "I should say it was Deutz & Geldermann's of seventy-four."

"By Jove," said his host, "I wouldn't have thought it! That's just what it is! I've got the only lot; imported it myself."

"You must have given the subject of champagne a great deal of thoughtful attention," said Mrs. Courtlandt, gravely, "to discriminate so nicely. But I have observed that most men have a reverent admiration for that kind of knowledge. You may be sure that from now on there is no subject upon which Mr. Cabot will not have an immense respect for your opinion."

"You think my talents might have been better employed, I suppose," he replied; "and that a true patriot should stay at

home, and drink, if he drank at all, say Cook's 'Imperial' or 'Grand Prize' or some other native product. Suppose that I had said that all wines were pretty much alike to me, and, except that champagne had carbonic-acid gas in it, I could not tell it from any other, much less distinguish brands,—that, in fact, I preferred cold tea to any of them,—would that have raised me in your esteem?"

"No," was her reply; "for I should not have believed you; and, in the second place, perhaps I have a sort of reluctant admiration for your discrimination. It would be a willing one in almost any other subject, but, although I have all my life been accustomed to see wine freely used——"

She broke off as if the subject were distasteful to her, and, after a pause, said, "You seem to have found a suggestion of criticism in almost everything I have said to you, and your last rejoinder plainly indicated it, I thought. I am afraid you will think that *savoir-faire* is not one of

my characteristics, or that I am a bit of a prig."

"As I told you at first, Mrs. Courtlandt," said Strathmore, "I am anxious to begin rightly, and have watched for clues not only in what you have said to me, but in the manner of your saying it."

"It seems to me," she remarked, with a little laugh, "that it is I who should have been on my guard."

"No," he replied; "pray let me consider that you have paid me the compliment of taking me seriously enough to talk to in that vein."

"I think I am not quite myself to-night," she said. "Perhaps I am dreading the journey more than I thought. Do you believe that there may be such things as presentiments?" she added, quickly; and then, without waiting for his reply, "I feel as if some great change in my life were impending. This is not exactly a scene or situation to suggest occult things, is it?—this rather ordinary, every-day company of people, eating and drinking, and

talking nineteen to the dozen !—and yet I have now, and have had all the evening, an indefinable sense that the old, accustomed order of things was passing, myself with it ; and,” she added, musingly, “not the least strange thing to me is that I should be saying this to you, the acquaintance of an hour.”

She had not looked up while speaking, and he had been gazing steadfastly at her bent face. Again he was aware of the sensation that the moment was not of the real present, but a vivid memory of the past. She frowned as if conscious of his gaze, and made a little impatient movement of her shoulders as if to shake off a disturbing thought, and, turning to Jack Young, said, “What are you going to do this winter, Mr. Young?”

“Am thinking of setting up an easel in Tom Blaik’s studio,” replied he (Blaik was a banker and broker in stocks). He’s got an immense opinion of my t-talent.”

“Catch you in my studio with your rattle-traps !” said Blaik. “You’d better

paint a picture and call it 'P. D. Q., or the Race for Wealth.' I say, Overton, is there likely to be a lease of the 'L' roads to the Powhatan?"

"You'd better ask Cabot," replied Overton (who was a corporation lawyer of high standing). "Perhaps he can tell you more than I——" he hesitated.

"Feel like saying," suggested Blaik. Overton laughed and looked at Blaik over his glass.

"Come 'round in the morning," said the host to Blaik, "say about eleven. I've got something I want to say to you." And then to Strathmore, "I suppose you don't take much interest in the market?"

"Yes; on the contrary, I do," was the reply, "in a way; and the situation is at present a very interesting one to my mind; in fact the market has something to do with my being here just now, and before long I shall beg the privilege of consulting you upon some affairs of mine."

"Delighted, I'm sure," was the cordial response. "Any time at your pleasure.

I'm not sure I mightn't like some of your views. If you can sense a 'deal' the way you can a wine we might do something between us ; and, egad, I've noticed the two things go together sometimes."

"They say lookers-on see most of the game," said Mr. Blaik. "What do you think of it at present?"

"It seems to me," replied Strathmore, "that the general trend of things is to be about what it has been for a year or more ; but if anything should happen, or, I may say, when something does happen to give the public mind a shock, the climax will have been reached."

"And what, may I ask," said Overton, "is the nature of that event which you are almost predicting, and when is it likely to take place?"

"You should not ask an oracle to particularize," said Strathmore, with a smile. "Most of the significance of events lies in the time of their happening. But what I had in mind was not in the nature of a failure of crops or the bankruptcy of a

railroad. It will come, I apprehend, if it come at all, out of the political atmosphere. The ugly legacies of the war are not all spent. But if I talk politics at Mrs. Cabot's table," he said, addressing her and wishing to change the subject, "I am afraid she will never ask me again."

"No," said she, "I don't think men ought ever to talk politics at dinner. I always head Mr. Cabot off the minute he begins. He gets perfectly wild! Yes, you do, James; you know you do," shaking her finger at him; "perfectly rabid!"

"You hit it that time, Strathmore," cried his host. "My wife's got politics and Tammany Hall and dirty streets and so on all mixed up together, and thinks they're all of the same piece. She'd have stopped you, I guess, if you hadn't anticipated her. You've found one of her notions for yourself, and as I hope you'll be coming here a good deal, I may as well warn you of another. She thinks, in spite of her own mistake in that direc-

tion, that everybody ought to be married, and she'll be after you. So you look out. In fact, I thought I heard her making some suggestions on the subject to you this evening. Hey! What? (to the butler). Yes; the Vougeot. Yes! Yes!" and Strathmore was spared a reply.

The dinner was drawing to an end and the voices of the diners mingled in a slight confusion of sound, not loud, but in which only now and then a detached remark would be distinguished.

Ernest Courtlandt with a flush upon his handsome face (he had taken little or no part in any general conversation) was bandying jest, repartee, and compliment with the not too young young-woman, who with somewhat heightened color and shining eyes was apparently fully alive to the spirit of the game, while the hostess looked on at them with occasionally a puzzled smile, as if she were not quite up to their quick sallies and replies.

The three men at the head of the table

were talking the gossip of the "street," and Jack Young was bewildering Mrs. Overton (at his left) with a farrago of sentimental misquotations and perversions, to the great amusement of Mrs. Wheeler across the table (to whom he occasionally looked for approval) and of himself.

It seemed to Strathmore as if he and Mrs. Courtlandt were alone by themselves, and he said as much to her, adding, as he looked at the menu card, "This warns me that we shall soon be saying 'good-by.'"

"Yes," she said, "it will, at any rate, soon be 'good-night,' for we take an early train in the morning. You will be here often, I fancy, during your stay. Diana is quite prepared to take you in hand," she added, smiling.

"Mrs. Cabot is very good," he replied, "and I am indebted to her for an unusually pleasant evening. I have, of course, never known her well, but I used to know her people, and I remember her from

her young girlhood. Are you specially friends, may I ask? It would not occur to me that you had very much in common."

"We are very friendly," she replied, "if not exactly great friends. She has always been very cordial and kind to me from the first; and she is very honest and loyal."

"You would trust her, then?" he said.

"Yes, in so far as to be sure that she would never knowingly fail me," she answered.

"You think, then," said he, "that complete trust in another implies—requires a large element of sympathy; and you must be confident of your friend's intelligence as much as of his loyalty. He may play you false simply because he does not comprehend."

"That is quite true," she responded. "I do not disparage Diana. She is kindness itself, but she is not always perfectly *à propos*, and, as you may have discovered this evening, she will some-

times touch a sensitive or a sore spot—with no intention at all.”

“I hope I did not appear to wince,” he said, smiling. “I am not conscious of any serious galls, and she is not the first good woman to make a similar suggestion. I might confess to a slight tingle when I saw Miss Sear looking at me with such undisguised amusement; but while I was not quite prepared to ‘unpack my heart’ for Mrs. Cabot, I was rather amused myself than otherwise. No, thanks,” he said, declining the red wine which the butler proffered. “Do all women feel, I wonder,” he said, taking up the conversation with Mrs. Courtlandt, “that every man should have some one to ‘sort of look after him and make him comfortable,’ as she put it?”

She laughed a little as she replied, “I don’t know about all, but I suspect that most women would probably share Mrs. Cabot’s views. Not all of them, however, would be likely to say as much to you; and Diana is about the only one

to propose to find some nice girl, and that——”

“Who wouldn’t think,” he put in, “‘I looked so very old, and would be willing to take me in spite of my graying hair.’ You would not, at any rate, I fancy,” he added.

“No,” she replied; “and I haven’t said that I was one to entertain Mrs. Cabot’s views. And yet, do you remember what you said to me this evening: that you had absolutely no ties; that you belonged to no one and no one to you? Is that exactly true? I confess to you that, while I am not a very sentimental person (so my friends say), I am woman enough to think that is rather forlorn.”

“I was not bemoaning myself,” he replied. “I was rather excusing myself and justifying my wanderings; but what I said was exactly the truth. I have a great many friendly acquaintances, and there are two or three *men* whom I may call friends—who are; but there is not in all the world any woman whom I may

call by her first name, or to whom I am Jack or even John."

"Maybe it is your fault," she said. "Perhaps you have not cared that there should be. You seem to me," she added, after a pause and with a secret wonder at her own frankness, "like a man whom women would trust and like; but they like to be depended upon a little, and perhaps you are too self-sufficing."

"It is not that," he replied. "For some years of my life no one could be more dependent upon another than I was, and after her death I went about for years with a dull, incredulous wonder that I should be living while she were not. I have learned to do without, or made myself believe so. I have not changed so much: circumstances have; and then, I have had no abiding-place."

"Friendship is somewhat a matter of streets after all, then," she said, with a smile.

"Yes," he replied; "you have to have an opportunity, certainly. I think," he

said, after a moment's silence, "that I could be a good friend if any woman cared to have me."

She turned, as if upon a sudden impulse, and said, "I think you could."

A flush of color came into her face as she looked away, and for the first time raised her wine-glass to her lips.

He sat in silence for a moment, and then said, quite softly, "Mrs. Courtlandt, I shall be here when you return. Do you think you could give me a trial?"

"We shall be extremely glad to see you on our return," she answered, quickly and a little stiffly.

Strathmore smiled rather grimly as he turned his face away, recalling Jack Young's happy figure: "They don't get too close to the cage more than once;" and she said to herself, as she felt rather than saw his expression, "Oh, how like me that was!"

Nothing further passed between them until the hostess's signal; but then, as she rose to pass in front of him on her way

from the table, she put out her hand, and, looking up at him, smiled and said, "If you think it worth your while. Good-night."

Before the men left the dining-room she had gone home.

CHAPTER II.

“Ye weep for those who weep?” she said—
“Ah, fools! I bid you pass them by;
Go weep for those whose hearts have bled,
What time their eyes were dry!
Whom sadder can I say?”—she said.

It was the morning of a day some weeks after Mrs. Cabot's dinner. Mrs. Courtlandt was writing some perfunctory letter,—not at the table, which was crowded with a confused litter of books, trinkets, and miscellaneous odds and ends, but, as most women, not distinctly literary in their habits, prefer,—on a pad on her knee.

Through the open window of her apartment came the flower-scented air of Southern California, bearing the ecstatic scream of a child's laughter and the deeper-toned response of a man's voice. She looked up smiling, and then rose and

walked to the window. Her little daughter and husband were pelting each other with flowers, and the child was dancing about on her little feet in a perfect abandon of merriment.

As she passed the cluttered table, the skirt of her morning-gown dislodged a book which she had finished and her husband had begun upon some days before. From between its pages, as she lifted it from the floor, fell an envelope evidently containing an enclosure, but unsealed and without address. The stationery was her own, and her first thought, that it might be a note which she had written and forgotten to send. She opened it without the slightest suspicion. It was in her husband's handwriting, and her instant impulse was to restore the enclosure to its envelope and put it back whence it had fallen; but the impulse was checked by a word which caught her eye. The note was as follows :

"You cannot wish or expect me to write to you of places and scenery when

heart and mind are so full to overflowing of you and you alone, my beloved !

“This is called the land of flowers, but there *are no* flowers for me where you are not, my own ! my ‘Queen Rose’ of all the gardens of earth ! Do you miss me, I wonder, and long for me as I do for you ? I have your last dear letter. Oh, I know it by heart. There are only two hours in the day for me. They are the hours when the mail is due, and the days which bring me nothing have no page in my calendar. I starved for a week for your last one, and when it came I put it in my pocket and carried it about all day unread. I was like a child about it,—I wanted to make it last.

“You say you may be in Cleveland in three weeks. I shall endeavor to meet you there. I have some business interest which will serve as reason for going that way. I suppose I shall get not much more than a sight of you, but I weary for that. Oh ! you do not know——” It broke off as if the writer had been sud-

denly interrupted. She read it through the second time with deliberate slowness, and then, with fingers that did not tremble but which were as cold as death, she folded it carefully back into the envelope and replaced it in the volume.

“How calm I am!” she thought. “Yes, I am perfectly calm, and by-and-by when I am able to think about it—yes, I shall be able to feel it perhaps.” She took her head in her hands, shutting the palms hard down upon her eyes, and after a while, with first a stagger and then more steadily, went into her room, locked the door, and stood for a moment holding to the footboard of her bed with one hand, pressing the other to her temple. And then, as the stunned mind and senses roused themselves, she threw herself face down upon the bed. No tears came to “cleanse her bosom of the perilous stuff,” but her breast was rent and her whole frame convulsed by that terrible tearless sobbing which is the dry retching of the sick soul.

What was this thing! A few pencilled words on a bit of paper, and her whole scheme of existence shattered into a mass of jagged fragments which cut and tore her heart. What had happened that could so change her in a moment from a contented and smiling wife into the tortured woman who was writhing and moaning in such dire distress upon the bed? Her head seemed bursting. Mechanically, she put up her hand and loosened the coils of her hair and flung it streaming down her back. But nature is merciful unless she means to kill, and gives pain its own limits. Gradually she grew physically quieter from sheer exhaustion, but her mind seemed stimulated to an almost insane activity. A multitude of things which she would not have supposed herself to have noticed—to which she had attached no importance—came pressing into her mind, and link by link the whole wretched story unfolded itself to her vision. Oh, how blind she had been! so trusting, so confident of herself! Was it

a year ago,—two years,—she could not tell, that he had said to her, “Beatrice, I don’t believe you have ever really loved me. I don’t believe you could ever really love any man. I warn you that I am not more monogamous than other men: suppose some other woman should care for me, who should fill my heart?” And as she had put his question to one side with some soothing, half-jesting reply, thinking that it was instigated by the wine which had been somewhat freer than usual, he had exclaimed, bitterly, “By Jove! I don’t believe you’d care a hang, if you thought no one else knew it!”

Blind! blind! Had he intended to warn her? Had he intended to give her a chance to help him against himself? she wondered, with a pang. What ought she to do? What *could* she do? “What would he do if it were I?” she thought, with her first (and fleeting) sensation of anger, as she imagined the white-hot wrath with which he would have accused and denounced *her*. “If there were no

Marian!" she thought. But there was Marian. Oh, yes; and she must be considered first of all.

She was a woman with a strong sense of justice. She began to question herself. The thought that another woman should usurp the place of which she had been so sure was intolerable to her; but was it wholly her love or partly her pride that was so outraged thereby? Had her husband been right when he said that thing? Was it possible that she was incapable of the love that might have held him? Was it possible that she did not love him? No; of course, she loved him! What other man had she ever given a thought to? Had she not nursed him in sickness and obeyed him in health, and borne with all his whims and tempers and mutations with unfailing gentleness? Had she not, through all her married life, given him the first thought, and been only anxious to anticipate his every wish, finding all her reward in his approval? Was she not his wife and the mother of his child?

Of course, she loved him ; he was hers, and she would not give him up !—And then came the sickening thought that, whether she would or no, it was too late. The mischief was done, and the coil was too hard for her to undo.—Were all men like that, and were all women in peril of such pain and shame as were tormenting her? What did men want? Had she not done her best?

“Oh,” she cried, “there was real love in that horrible letter! He never loved me like that. He never wrote me such a letter as that!” She lay with her face to the wall, holding her hands tight to her temples.

Through the open window came the sound of a piano, the prelude to a song, and then a girl’s voice, singing,—a clear, trained voice, that brought the words straight into the ears and heart of the poor child so hardly bestead,—

“Unless you can muse in a crowd all day
On the absent face that fix’t you ;
Unless you can love as the angels may
With the breadth of heaven betwixt you ;

Unless you can feel that your faith is fast
Through behaving and unbehaving ;
Unless you can die when the dream is past,
Oh, never call it loving !”

She half raised herself on her arm, and, turning her face to the window and pushing back the hair which had fallen over ear and cheek, she listened breathlessly for the next verse.

“Unless you can say when the song is done
No other is sweet in the rhythm ;
Unless you can feel when left by one
That all men else go with him ;
Unless you can know when unpraised by his
breath
That your beauty itself wants proving ;
Unless you can swear—for life ! for death !
Oh, never call it loving !
Oh, never” (the song repeated), “never call
it loving !”

She threw herself down, with her face in her arms, and burst into passionate weeping.

“Oh,” she moaned, “it isn’t like that !
It has never been like that ! God pity

me! I am so young, and it never will be, never can be like that *for me!*"

She was wakened by a knock at her door.

"Yes," she said.

"Are you ill, Beatrice?" asked her husband's voice.

"I have had a touch of headache and have been asleep," she answered, coming to the door but not opening it.

"We were going to drive, you know, before luncheon,—dinner they call it in this benighted place; but perhaps you'd rather put it off till later if your head aches?"

"It isn't very serious," she replied. "I will be out in a minute and talk it over with you."

"All right," he said, pleasantly.

She came out dressed for driving, and as she entered the room her husband was putting his hand into the inside pocket of his short coat. The book had been moved from where she had left it.

"What's the matter?" he asked, as she


seated herself and took up a fan from the table. "You looked all right, I thought, this morning."

"Yes," she said; "it came on rather suddenly. There are almost too many flowers, I think," she added, holding up her fan against the light.

"Nothing but flowers in the confounded place," he assented, pinching the end of a cigarette. "I smoke twice as much as usual to get the taste out of my nose. Well, what do you say? Shall we go or not? It will kill some of the time between now and their ridiculous dinner, and maybe it will help your head. Let's have a look at you," he said, as he came over to her, and, putting his hand under her chin, tipped her face a little back.

She tried in vain to raise her eyes to his face, but the lids fluttered shut in spite of her effort, while at his touch a revulsive shudder passed through her whole body.

"Why!" he exclaimed, "are you having a chill? You *do* look rather droopy. Guess we'd better give it up, hadn't we?"



"No," she said, rising resolutely; "I am all ready for it and dressed for it. Let us go. I dare say the air and motion will set me quite right. Where is Marian? We are going to take her, aren't we?"

"Oh, yes," he replied, laughing; "if she were left behind, she wouldn't know her own father for a week. Come down when you are ready. I'll have the horses sent 'round at once," he said, as he left the room.

The reaction was upon her. In her deepest consciousness she was keenly aware of all that had happened, and knew that in the last two hours she had started upon a new departure, herself a different person, yet she could not quite realize the tragedy of it. She remembered rather than recognized her husband. She was aware of a sort of wonder that she should remember so well that that was the way he talked and looked, and some characteristic expression or movement of his seemed curiously familiar to her, like

something a long time forgotten accidentally brought to mind.

She answered his questions or replied to his remarks and comments by a sort of reflex action of the mind ; but for the time he was as impersonal to her as the figure of a dream. And yet there was nothing in her appearance or manner as they took the drive together which attracted his notice or comment. It might, possibly, have been otherwise except for the presence of Marian, who, like all children, rather bored by the necessity for sitting still, constantly demanded to get out at every bunch of flowers and "get some," and be set down at frequent intervals along the beach to pick up shells and seaweed, all of which had to be duly admired and stowed away.

Ernest was unusually complaisant ; but at last he announced to the small enthusiast that "this ended it." "If we pick up any more of the Pacific coast, there won't be any place to go next time."

"Wouldn't there, pops?" asked the

child, taking him gravely. "'N' what would we do to get shells and fings when we wanted to get 'em some other time?"

"We'd have to camp out somewhere down here," he said, cuddling the little creature under his arm, "and do our picking up 'round the hotel. Kiss your daddy now to give him an appetite, and we'll see if these deplorable, district-messenger brutes are susceptible to the lash-civious pleasings of the horsewhip."

"He used to talk like that sometimes when he was in the mood," was the thought which came into her mind, and she smiled responsively as he turned to her for approval of his jesting.

They made one more remove before starting homeward some three weeks later, and in the interval it seemed at times that she had found the plane on which her life was henceforth to be lived. Love forgives (alas! it does not so forget) with open hands. It is not only that we

forgive those whom we love, but loving much, we condone in ourselves sometimes our trespasses to those we love. But there are some natures who feel that not to give love where it might seem to be due is a wrong, and they will try to make amends by the more assiduous devotion.

The discovery of her husband's dereliction had been a profound shock ; but the revelation of her own real feeling for him had been perhaps even a greater one. She was inclined with an almost morbid conscientiousness to find herself to blame for all that had happened. She remembered with pitiable self-censure his thoughtless reproaches of her lack of fondness for him, and racked her memory for instances of her coldness. Had he but known her state of mind and cared to avail himself of it, it is possible that there had never been a time in all their years together when he might have so completely won her whole devotion. Blaming herself so much as she contrived to do, she found herself at last actually pitying him his

love for another woman. And when, a fortnight before they started East, he was suffering the feverish depression of a violent cold, she surprised him, accustomed as he was to her solicitude, by the fervor with which she ministered to him. And yet, had he loved her, he would have noticed that hardly ever did her hand, and never did her lips, touch him.

At last they turned them homeward ; but she was too much woman not to defeat the Cleveland plan. She could pity him for his hapless love, but she could not assist him to feed it ; she could forgive *him*, but, as a dove might hate, she could hate the woman ; and although she was prepared to meet her if need be with careful courtesy (as part of her penance), she was illogical enough to have no pity for *her*.

They had been gone a little more than two months ; once more she was in the house where she had come as a bride six years before.

The butler was smiling in dignified gratification at her hope "that he had been nicely;" the housekeeper was hoping that she was well, and was "ever so glad to see her;" and her own maid (they had taken only Marian's with them) was assuring her that "the house hadn't been any sort of a place without her," while her own thought was a sort of wonder that the kind creatures recognized her at all.

"Thank you, Roberts," she said to her maid, handing her her wraps; "thank you very much. I will ring for you directly. Tell them not to serve dinner until eight o'clock."

When the maid had left the room, Mrs. Courtlandt turned on one gas-jet after another till there was a blaze of light, and went up to the long dressing-glass. "Do I know you?" she said, staring straight into the eyes that met her own, "and do you know me?"

CHAPTER III.

“The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together.”

AMONG the notes and cards of invitation and announcement which the Courtlandts found waiting them on their return was one which informed them that Mr. and Mrs. J. Briggs Stephenson would be “At Home” on Thursday evening.

As they were breakfasting on the morning of that day, Mrs. Courtlandt handed it to her husband across the table.

“Hum!” he said, “they’ve cast their slough, have they? and propose to show off that brand-new house of theirs. I suppose everybody will go, out of sheer curiosity. I think at home without dancing would suit my book the way I feel this morning. Shall you go?”

“That depends upon you,” she replied, looking up at him.

"I don't see why," he said, looking at her and quickly averting his eyes with a slight scowl. "Oh, yes," he exclaimed, as she was about to speak, "I know: you don't like to go about without your husband, and all that. You've done it often enough though, and lived through it, haven't you?"

She made no reply, nor did her expression indicate emotion of any sort.

"My dear girl," he went on, "you're not a bride, but a married woman of six years' standing. This isn't Plymouth settlement nor the seventeenth century. It is New York City in the nineteenth. I wish you'd get over your notion that marriage ought to be a perpetual *tête-à-tête*. Haven't you had enough of me in the last two months?" he asked, more pleasantly; and then, "You go if you like, and I'll come later in the evening. If any one objects or is anxious on my account, tell them I was detained on business and am coming later. Won't that do?"

"Yes," she replied; "such a veracious excuse as that will be quite sufficient."

"All right, then, that's settled," he said, cheerfully, looking up the morning paper.

"Hello! here you have it," he exclaimed, reading, "'Fashionable Intelligence.—Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Courtlandt have returned from an extended visit to the Western coast.' What's this? Confounded idiot! 'We are glad to say that Mr. Courtlandt's health is fully restored.' I'd like to know if there has been any report around about my health. Have you been telling people I was an invalid?"

"I do not remember doing so," she replied, quietly.

"Do you think there's anything the matter with me?" he demanded, suspiciously.

She caught her lips between her teeth in restraint of the reply that rose to her tongue, but could not help saying so much as, "You seem to me to be quite your usual self *this morning*."

There was a hint of revolt in her tone that was strange. He stared at her for a moment, but her bent face was quite impassive. He rose and went out of the room.

She took up the paper listlessly, but her face brightened as her eyes caught the announcement: "Grand Symphony Concert. Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Orchestra of Sixty Pieces under the leadership of Theodore Thomas, Mme. Helene Hastreiter, etc."

"Ah!" she said to herself, "I believe I've been starving for music without knowing it, and that is partly why I am so restless and down."

She looked up, smiling, as her husband came into the room. "Oh, Ernest," she exclaimed, "Thomas is going to play the Fifth Symphony to-morrow night and Hastreiter is to sing. I haven't heard any music for an age! Won't it be charming?"

"Should think it might for some people," he said, suppressing a yawn as he

reached over and took the flower, for which he had come back, out of the vase on the breakfast-table. "‘When people like that sort of thing that’s the sort of thing they like.’ You don’t expect me to go, do you?" he asked, with a grin, putting the rose-bud into his coat.

"I thought perhaps you might. I don’t see how any one can help liking ‘that sort of thing,’" she replied, repeating his phrase. "You are fond of music, more so than you pretend, I sometimes think."

"Oh, yes," he said, "I like music well enough, some kinds; but when it comes to symphonies and German opera, well,—once in two years is about twice often enough for the subscriber. Do you remember the night you got me into the ‘Tristan and Isolde’ scrape?"

"Do you mean the night," she asked, laughing, "when, after making me give away the box, *you* changed your mind for some unknown reason, and we got belated seats in the parquet?"

"Yes," he replied, joining in the laugh;

"we got jammed in and I had to sit it out. I had a tight shoe on, you remember, and by the time the show was well under way it shut down on me like grim death. Sha'n't forget that night in a hurry, I can tell you!" he asserted, with a shake of the head. "I thought the thing would never come to an end," he continued. "Three mortal hours those barbarians howled at each other in a foreign tongue; and the fiddlers dug and sawed; and the hardware fellows strained away till I thought they'd blow those horns of theirs right out straight; and all the time that foot of mine was accumulating blood enough to fill the Croton reservoir and aching like a serpent's tooth."

"I remember," she said, laughing, "I was awfully sorry for you, but you were too funny. I never saw such squirming. I did not laugh at you much though, did I, at the time?"

"No," he replied; "you were too polite, I suppose. I don't think you enjoyed the performance very much your-

self, though, trying to hear with one ear and sympathize with me with the other."

"I don't think my enjoyment was entirely consecutive," she assented, "and I was almost as much relieved as you were when the opera was over. I was in mortal terror, for one thing, that the stout old German who sat just in front would assault you. Do you remember how he kept looking around at your very audible grumblings, and how he kept getting redder and redder?"

"Yes," he cried, with a peal of laughter; "and I remember wishing he'd burst a blood-vessel and have to be carried out, so that I could go too. That was a pleasant evening,—profitable evening, too," he said, reflectively. "It broke up the German opera habit, which was fastening itself upon me, completely; and another thing, he added, looking down at his foot and giving it a twist, "I've had a good many good times in my life, but for real solid enjoyment, taking off that shoe beat anything I ever experienced."

"I conclude, then, that you don't intend to hear Thomas to-morrow night. You might go in slippers, you know," she said, smiling.

"Oh, I guess you'll have to let me off just this *once*," he replied, making a movement to go.

The bud in his coat had fallen forward, and as he turned she rose and said, "Wait a minute while I pin it in for you."

He turned to her, holding out the lapel of his coat. She adjusted the flower and pinned it in place, and as she finished he leaned a little forward towards her. With a subtle motion she bent her face, turning it slightly as if to make sure that her work was properly done, and his lips just grazed the hair upon her forehead.

"That will stay now," she remarked, in reply to his thanks. He turned, without noticing the blush that covered her face, and went away in the good humor into which he had talked and laughed himself.

She took a companion bud out of the vase on the table and made as if to put it

in the bosom of her dress, but, after a moment's hesitation, she carefully replaced it, giving the flowers all around little caressing lifts and touches with the tips of her fingers as if they might be conscious of and enjoy her petting.

It was a clear, crisp winter's morning, and there was a tone and sparkle in the air which made itself felt in-doors as well as out. She felt an unaccountable lifting of the heart. Perhaps it was the laughing old-time talk with her husband and the thought that she seemed to be able to please him. Perhaps she was a little glad of the impulse which she had baffled; perhaps it was simply the reaction of her youth and strength against the weary and spiritless mood which had dominated her of late; perhaps it was the sanitary influence of accustomed surroundings and habitual daily occurrences and duties which, for the moment, made the past weeks seem like the timeless period of a tormenting dream. She hummed a bit of a song as she went to her "growlery," as she called

it, for the daily interviews with the housekeeper, the butler, and even the coachman. She was housewife to the tips of her fingers. She enjoyed the details of her housekeeping with the relish of an expert for his calling, and therefore it was so systematic, and by consequence so easy to her, that she had always time for such reading as she cared for and the social duties which were incumbent.

The day passed quickly. Her husband did not come in until time to dress for dinner, and they dined alone. In answer to her rather careless question as to what he had done during the day and whom he seen, he made some evasive and non-committal reply, and they had very little talk during the meal. But at last he said, with an air of having found a topic both interesting and safe, "By the way, Beatrice, I met John Strathmore to-day at luncheon. I was rather surprised, notwithstanding he told me he expected to stay all winter, for it would have been just like him to skip off any time, and I told him so."

"Did he seem gratified at your confidence in his stability?" she asked, smiling. "What did he say?"

"He said," replied Ernest, "that he didn't think I realized what a pleasant place New York was in the winter, and that he doubted very much if the fleas and flowers of California would be a profitable exchange for such a day as this, for example."

"And you?" queried Mrs. Courtlandt.

"I said, says I, 'You're just too dead right to be President. If ever you saw a man who is sick of that land of congested vegetables and Chinamen, I'm that man. And as for flowers,' I said, 'as I feel now, I'd walk three-quarters of a mile to kick a florist.'"

"Did Mr. Strathmore tell you what he has been doing?" she asked, with some curiosity, recalling a conversation she had with him just before her departure.

"No," he replied. "I did not have a chance to talk very much to him. There were several men at the table. Jack

Young's got a lot of fairy-tales about him,—stock-market, and so on,—but I wouldn't stop to hear him."

"Jack is not exactly a favorite of yours," she said.

"No," said Ernest; "he's well enough, but I'm a little particular about my favorites."

She rose from the table.

"I suppose you are going to the Stephensons'," he said. "Well, just tell them not to wait anything on my account. I'll look in before it's time to go home."

CHAPTER IV.

“Facie ad faciem.”

NEITHER the Stephensons nor their house call for any extended description. They had come to New York some years previously with a great deal of money to spend if need be; and the really superb house which they had just gone into, and were exhibiting for the first time, had been built because they thought they should enjoy such a one, and not for the purpose of outdoing anybody.

Unlike most of the rich Westerners who come to New York (in novels), they had no *gauche* and slangy girls to get husbands for or to defend from adventurers. Their only child was a young man of about eight-and-twenty, of unexceptionable manners and appearance.

Husband and wife were portly and



comfortable-looking people. She was aptly described by Jack Young's remark when some one asked him if they lived in New York long ; he said, " he believed not ; but she looked as if the climate agreed with her, didn't she ? "

They had taken counsel with their son George upon the subject of their house-warming. He had said, " We have not lived here sufficiently long to know people enough to fill this big house, but we know a good many, and among them are some women who know or know about pretty much everybody. I should tell one or two of them what I proposed to do, and get them to make out a list and ask the lot they suggest. They'll come, don't you be alarmed ; and some of them will jeer and sneer and eat your supper and drink your wine and dance to your music, but those who are worth knowing won't do that, if they come at all, and I'm not afraid of anything that can be said about you, mother, and the governor. "

Mrs. Stephenson recalled her son's remark as Beatrice Courtlandt came up to her and said (she was alone), "I am Mrs. Courtlandt." They had exchanged cards, but had never met.

"Oh, yes," was the reply, as an ample palm enclosed Beatrice's slim fingers cordially, and the older woman's eyes looked almost affectionately into hers. "I've known you by sight a good while. One does not forget such faces as yours. Do you mind my saying that?" and, "It's very nice of you to come."

"I'm very pleased to come," said Mrs. Courtlandt, "and I'm sure I should like anything you would say to me," thinking, "What a kind, sensible, sympathetic face it is!"

"I should always mean it kindly, at any rate," said Mrs. Stephenson; adding to herself, "If you were my daughter, I should just take you into my arms and make you tell me what that look in your sweet face means and all about it."

Beatrice moved away as some other

people came up, and was at once greeted and presently surrounded by acquaintances, who were telling her how glad they were to see her, asking questions, and talking pretty well all at once the small talk, orthodox at such times, in which she took part rather absently. The group separated and she found herself standing, for the moment, alone. The band was playing a set of quadrilles, and she got interrupted glimpses of the dancers in the ball-room, diagonally across the great hall, winding in and out, bowing and wheeling into place.

"May I recall myself to Mrs. Courtlandt's recollection?" she heard in a man's voice, and, looking up in its direction, she found John Strathmore regarding her with a half-smile in his eyes, —a look she had seen once before, and which brought another scene to her mind, in which she was saying, "If you think it worth your while," and when his face had borne just the expression that she now saw.

"Mr. Strathmore!" she said, with a little lift in her voice.

"Quite so," he said, smiling. "You see I am as good as my word: I am still here." "And a man might well wish that you were the reason," he thought, as the soft hand rested in his for an instant, and he felt the walls of his soul expand as he took a long breath of her loveliness. Man he was, and incapable of appreciating the feminine significance of her attire. Indeed, no man quite comprehends the seriousness with which women worship themselves, and particularly as to their offerings of lavish daintiness made in secret. He only realized that she had on a dress of silver-gray brocade and that she was very beautiful to look upon.

"I am glad," she said, simply. "But I did not take what you said that night as a promise to me. You said, 'I shall be here,' you know, not 'I *will* be here.'" She spoke as it came to her, and with a certain after-thought of surprise that she should herself give so personal a tone to

the conversation ; and when he said, "It was a promise,—at least you made it so when you relented. Do you remember what you said and what preceded it?" he became conscious of the reserve which was impending rather than visible in her face and changed his question. "Are you glad to be back again in the whirl?" he asked.

"Yes, I am glad to be home," she replied ; "but I don't think I care very much about the 'whirl.' I find that 'the trivial things of every day'—things which take my time and keep me, that is, occupy my mind—have grown so habitual that to be away from them very long rather irks me."

"Most things are trivial," he said, "taken by themselves. We spend our lives for the most part doing things which apparently count for nothing, by which we seem to make no headway, and, going no faster than the current, do not make steerage-way. There are times, however, when I am inclined to think it is just as

well," he added. "The current will often carry you around the rock against which you might have struck if you were steering."

"You would drift, then?" she said.

"Well," he replied, "it is often the safer way."

"I suppose it is the easier way," she said; "but it doesn't seem as if it could be the right way."

"All force works in the line of the least resistance," he suggested, curious as to her rejoinder.

"Yes," she said; "but isn't that rather a quibble? You'd hardly call gravitation a moral force, would you?"

"Yes," he replied, "I should say it was in this sense, that *all* natural forces tend towards what Arnold calls 'righteousness,' and all evolution is from the simple to the complex,—from the lower to the higher."

"Do you say that, as applied to life, the complex is better than the simple?" she asked.

"In the sense in which I used the word, yes," he answered. "By complexity I do not mean perplexity. What I have in mind is this, that the working of what we call purely natural forces tends all the time towards making life better; yes, I may say more tolerable if not more enjoyable—happiness, if you like—to the race of men. But the thought is, of course, not new to you," he added.

"No," she replied; "and it is not very consoling. The result comes too slowly for the individual. My altruism is not great enough to satisfy me in being merely an infinitesimal factor in an imperceptible progress."

"I feel myself, sometimes," he added, musingly, "as if I should like to cut off the entail."

Neither spoke for an interval. She turned to him with an impulse unaccountable to herself. "Is life worth living?" she exclaimed.

"Can you doubt it?" he said, gravely.

"I think I have never thought much

about it until of late," was her reply. "I have taken everything for granted. But, truly, do you think it is?" she added.

"I must believe so," he replied, "because I live."

"That sounds like faith," she said.

"Yes," he answered; "you may call it faith if you will. Faith is, to my mind, the outcome of all philosophy. But, resting upon nothing higher than mere philosophy, life can be very well worth living in this 'best of all possible worlds.'"

"How?" she asked. "What do you mean? Tell me."

"By making each day suffice for itself," he said. "By taking short views of life, taking the 'good' as it comes and letting to-morrow shift for itself. But you will never do that, I am afraid," he added, letting his eyes rest on her bent face.

"Why do you say that?" she asked, looking up at him quickly.

"Because," he answered, "you think too much; you question yourself too, much and your ideals are too high.

'A little laughter
Is much more worth
Than thus to measure
The hour, the treasure,
The pain, the pleasure,
The death, the birth.

'Live like the swallow ;
Seek not to follow
Where earth is hollow
Under the earth.'

Such philosophy is not for you."

"Is it for you?" she said.

"It is too old for me," he answered, smiling. "By the way, I see the 'Fifth' Symphony is to be given to-morrow night, and Hastreiter to sing; that's something of the 'good.'"

"Yes, indeed," she said. "I'm looking forward to it with so much pleasure. It is so long since I've heard any music. Do you care very much for it?" she asked.

"Very much, indeed," he replied, "when I'm in the mood for it, and I would go far almost any time to hear Hastreiter; but the 'C Minor' is not for all states of mind."

"No?" she said.

"No," he replied; "it is too much of a struggle. It is too suggestive of the stress and vicissitudes of life. You remember what Beethoven said of the beginning of it,—'So pocht das Schicksal an die Pforte.' One does not always care to feel that fate is knocking at the portal."

"No," she said; "but we have nationalized the sisters. They wear evening gowns nowadays, and we try to propitiate them by asking them to dinner and 'hoping that they are well.'"

"Are they here to-night, do you think?" he asked.

"I feel as if they were," she replied, with a little "shadow of laughter, like a sigh." "Mrs. Stephenson seems to have asked all my acquaintances."

"You will not be looking for them among the men, at any rate," he said. "Our sex exempts us from suspicion. In fact, as I remember, pretty much all the mythological agents of vengeance and

retribution and other unpleasant things—were female.”

He spoke lightly enough, and only in the line of her own remark, but she turned her head and looked at him for an instant as if to discover if there were more in his meaning than his words conveyed. The quiet face and the kind eyes which met her look told her nothing more. But something he had said to her at another time came to her mind,—“I think I could be a good friend to a woman, if she cared to have me.” Yes, it would be good to have such a friend—oh, no, she did not want to confide in him nor ask anything of him. She did not want to give him so much as even to let him more than guess her mood sometimes. But it would be pleasant to feel the regard of the man who seemed so strong, and kind, and understanding,—so much older and wiser than herself. No; she did not regret having almost promised to be his friend,—to “give him a trial,” as he had said; and she admitted to herself, without remorse,

that she had really given him just the least little bit—on the impulse of the moment—of a claim upon her, and the thought was not unwelcome. He had said to her that he had neither kith nor kin. It would be a kindness to a homeless, kinless man to be to him such a friend as she felt herself capable of being. Her husband liked him and admired him. She would like to have him feel—why not?—that he would always be welcome in her house; that he should feel that when he had no other place to go or no other whither he cared to go, that he might come there. There was nearly always tea at five o'clock, and she was often home in the evening.—She wondered if he liked tea.


How differently he talked to her from the other men she was in the habit of meeting!—lightly enough, and yet thoughtfully and in a way to inspire her thoughts. And he was so quick to take up the thread of her idea,—to say a thing for her, as it were! It was so easy to talk with him, she seemed to be at her best. And then, too,



there was something about the man, a personality, which invited her trust to which she felt a sense of yielding that was like content.

Their conversation went on, as one topic suggested another, and she found herself treating him as one she had long known, and she felt a welcome sense of security and quietude take the place of the restless and irritable temper in which she had come.

When Strathmore first saw her that evening she was standing in the drawing-room. As they talked together they had gradually given way to the encroachments of the thronging guests and had drifted out into the great central hall, which was the most attractive and conspicuous feature of the house. Opposite to the entrance to the drawing-room was the stairway leading to the upper stories. To the left, in line of the drawing-room, was the dining-room. Adjoining it was a very large music and dancing room, from which at either end were entrances to the



conservatory, which extended the whole length of the music-room. In the angles and sides of the hall and under the stairway were seats wherever opportunity offered.

As they came out of the drawing-room, they saw Jack Young standing in a group in the arched recess of the stairway.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Courtlandt, "there is Mr. Young. I have not seen him before."

"You may be sure, then," said Strathmore, "that he has not seen you. You need not be told, I fancy, how much he admires you, and you know him well enough," he added, with a short laugh, "to imagine what sort of figures of speech he employs to express his feeling."

"His always seeming to be so thoroughly not quite in earnest," she replied, turning his remark with a smile, "is one of his best points. But really, I do like him very much. Have you seen much of him this winter?"

"Oh, yes," he replied; "Jack and I are quite chums. Ah! he has seen

you and here he comes to drive me off," he said, as the young man looked across and nodded with a smile, and made a movement of breaking away from his companions.

"Not drive you off——" she began.


"Not exactly, perhaps," he said, "for I must be saying good-night. May I hope to be permitted to see you at the concert to-morrow—for a moment?"

"I shall be very glad, I am sure," she replied. "My box is 'G.'"

"Thank you very much. I will be very quiet if you'll let me come in for a little while. Good-night," he said, hesitating a moment.

"Good-night," she answered, but not offering him her hand.

"Awfully glad to see you back again, Mrs. Courtlandt," said Jack, taking the hand which she put out in greeting. "You're looking very well, if you'll allow me to say so. Hope you're glad, too."



"Thank you," she said, smiling at the young fellow, whom she liked and who always amused her, but whom, from her severe and reverend age of six-and-twenty, she looked upon as a boy, despite the fact that he was some years her senior. "Yes, I am very well, and it is pleasant to be home again."

"It's m-mighty pleasant to see you," he exclaimed. "Do you know when you're away it never in the least seems as if you were here. You understand what I m-mean?"

"Doubtless something very deep and metaphysical," she replied; "but it sounds rather obvious. Perhaps I shall reach the depths of it if you tell me how it seems when I am here."

"Oh," said he, "when you are here, you know, one doesn't m-miss the other people at all."

"I suppose that is intended to be very pretty," she said, with a smile, "but you are too intricate for me. This is quite a new side that you are exhibiting."

"'Tis not alone my k-kinky coat, good mother," he spouted, dramatically, wrinkling the garment mentioned into creases in his neck, "nor customary t-tails and t-trousers black that can denote me truly. I have that *inside* which out-Barnumeths the greatest sh-show on earth. You can't most always generally tell about me. I'm a l-labyrinth," he added, with intense gravity.

"You are perfectly *absurd!*" she said, laughing.

"Do you like absurdities?" he asked, "because, if you do, 'M-motley's my only wear.' And do you know," he continued, a little doubtfully, "I've noticed that while you often smile you seldom laugh. There are a thousand sorts of smiles, but there's only one kind of laughter,—the real thing, I mean. 'They also serve who only make you laugh' says, or ought to have said, M-Milton. Nothing matters much if you can only laugh, you know."

"Are you philosophizing for my consolation?" she said, a little coldly. ("Can

it be," the question flashed into her mind, "that—— Is this boy trying to let me see that—he knows?") "I should feel flattered at your nice observance ("Oh, Lord!" said Jack to himself; "trespassers will be rigorously prosecuted") of any peculiarities, but——" She stopped speaking, checked into poise by the expression of rue on his face, and then with a smile said, "When I am queen, Mr. Young, you shall be jester to the court." ("Egad!" thought Jack, "let off with a nominal fine!")

"I shall order my cap and bells in the morning, your Majesty," he exclaimed, making a feint of kneeling. "At what hour may it please you to g-give me audience? I have a well-ripened Joe M-Miller which will me-thinks delight thine ear."

"What a Jack it is!" she said, laughing good-humoredly, while the young fellow's face colored with pleasure at her use of his name.

He turned a little one side as some

acquaintances came up and spoke to her, but when they passed on he resumed the talk by saying, "You were talking with Strathmore just before I came up. I have seen quite a good deal of him the last two months."

"Yes," she replied; "he tells me he has at present no intention of going abroad, and that he has enjoyed being in New York this winter very much."

"Well, I should think he might," said Jack. "Everybody's taken a great shine to him, and in addition to that he's been making a *lot* of money, so I understand. At any rate, I know he's on the 'street' a good deal, and he and Blaik and Cabot and that lot are as thick as—as th-thick," he concluded, discarding his first simile.

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Courtlandt; "I should not have thought that speculating in stocks would be the sort of enterprise to attract him."

"I shouldn't have thought so myself," he replied; "at any rate, at first; and I don't think now he's 'playing the market'

the way some of 'em do. I've an idea," he added, "that it's more for an occupation, as you might say; and certainly the game is big enough for a man to put b-brains into."

"I can't understand it of him," she said, rather disdainfully.

"Well," said Jack, "I know he hasn't any excitement about it. I've known him to stay away from the street and, he said so any way, not look at a quotation for days at a time, when he had a big deal on hand, too. He's a c-cool hand," he added with conviction.

"Has anything in particular happened," she asked without much show of interest, "to disclose the temperature of his hand?"

"Well," said Jack, "I suppose most women know enough about the business to understand 'street' talk in a general way, but perhaps it will b-bore you. No? Well, you know, 'old gooseberry' (excuse me) was to pay last week. Things went down on the dead gallop and everybody that had a hole wanted to crawl in and

p-pull the hole in after him. It was blue, for a fact!" he asserted with emphasis. "Even yours truly felt as if he hadn't been p-properly rinsed. Last Thursday," he continued, "and Friday morning was the worst of it, and most of the chaps down-town had mislaid their heads so their own wives couldn't have found them. It *was bad!*" he said, with a shake of his head. "Well," he went on, "if you care to hear, all right; and if I get tut-too slangy, pull me up and I'll revise. About three weeks ago, I was in Blaik's office one morning about noon, talking to one of Blaik's brokers, young fellow by the name of Blenkins, when in came Strathmore. 'Morning, Jack,' he says; 'good-morning, Mr. Blenkins. Mr. Blaik about?'

"'Good-morning, sir,' says Blenkins; 'Mr. Blaik was here a moment ago. Think he went into his private office. I'll call him.'

"'Never mind,' says Strathmore; 'you'll do just as well. How is the market?'

“‘On the keen jump, sir,’ says Blenkins, ‘and looks like going a good deal higher. The public’s in it for all they’re worth, and there ain’t any old rattle-trap too poor for reverence these days.’

“‘What’s “Alexander and St. Thomas” selling at this morning?’ says Strathmore.

“‘A hundred and sixty-four and a quarter,’ says Blenk., going over to the ‘ticker.’ ‘She’s gone up three points and a half since the opening and about twenty in the last week.’

“‘They say there is a corner on it. What do you think?’ says Strathmore.

“‘Well, I don’t know, sir.’ (I never heard Blenk. say ‘sir’ to anybody else that I know of.) ‘I don’t know, sir, but it looks like it, the way it goes. They’re talking two hundred for it. It’s lending flat to an eighth and money sharp at six. That means something.’

“‘Well,’ said Strathmore, taking a cigar out of his pocket and going over to the mantel-piece for a match, ‘you may sell

ten thousand at the market, not under sixty-three, and a thousand every quarter up from sixty-four up to ten thousand more; that's twenty in all; and make the order "good." Shall I write it out?' he says.

" 'Not for me,' says Blenk., getting kind of red. 'I'd take any order you'd give, but, if you'll excuse me, I'd like to mention it to Mr. Blaik. He mayn't like to be short of the stock on this market and the way it's tending.'

" 'Certainly, by all means,' says Strathmore; 'ask him to step out if he isn't too busy.'

"I say, Mrs. Courtlandt," said Jack, "I'm afraid this is all Greek to you."

"Some of the language seems to be waiting 'crowner's 'quest,'" she said, smiling, "but I follow you fairly well, I think, and I'm not at all bored; quite the contrary."

"I've nearly finished," said Jack. "As I was saying, Blenkins went into Blaik's room, and in a minute out he came look-

ing pretty well flustered. 'Good God, Mr. Strathmore,' he says, 'do you realize what kind of an order you're giving? The stock is as good as "cornered," and to be "short" twenty thousand shares of a cornered stock is liable to be a pretty nasty fix.' He was swinging his watch-chain pencil round and round his finger, and looking a good bit b-bothered, I can tell you.

" 'I have given the matter some thought and I realize the nature of the transaction perfectly,' says Strathmore, 'but I don't wish to embarrass you if you feel at all apprehensive. Can you borrow the stock?'

" 'Oh, yes, yes, we can borrow the stock fast enough *now*,' says Blaik; 'flat and perhaps a premium, you understand; but the deuce only knows what we can do later on. When you get into a "corner," by Jove! and get "called," you've got to settle, and the other fellow makes the price. *I* know,' he said, 'and I'd made up my mind—— Why, look here, Strath-

more,' he says, 'there's more b-blanked fire-works in this confounded "Alexander and St. Thomas" than there is in all China; and if the worst comes to the worst, you understand——'

" 'I understand perfectly,' says Strathmore, 'and I shall expect you to treat my account strictly according to rule. I know, too,' he went on, 'that a house like Blaik & Company doesn't like to get caught or even to appear to have been. I have grounds for my action in this matter which are satisfactory to me and I shall see that you are amply protected; but do not, I beg you, hesitate for one moment to decline the order if it is going to disturb you in the least.'

"Blaik hesitated a minute and then blurted out, 'I'd hate to have you lose money in my office;' and I honestly think," remarked Jack, in pausing, "that he meant it, too. And then Strathmore took out his watch and looked at it and looked at Tom and sort of smiled.

" 'Here, Blenkins,' said Blaik, 'all right;

go ahead ;' and then to Strathmore, 'Where shall I have the reports sent?'

" 'I'm going to wait here for a while,' says he, going over to the window and looking out. It was snowing, great big flakes. 'I like to watch it snow,' says he. 'I'd like to go on an old-fashioned straw ride in the country once more.'

" Blaik just gave one stare at him and walked off into his room without another word, and if you'll believe me, before one o'clock that stock was sold ; and when Blaik came in and handed him the last report he said, 'Thanks, Mr. Blenkins, you've done extremely well. Can you dine with Young and me at Delmonico's to-night, at—shall we say seven?'

" 'With pleasure ; thank you, sir !' says Blenkins ; 'but I think I ought to settle myself. I don't often make four hundred as quick as I have to-day.'

" Strathmore just smiled at him and said, 'Come along, Jack ; let's go up town.' "

Jack stopped and made a little gesture

as if to say, "The story is finished," and looked about the room as if in search of another topic.

After a moment's silence, Mrs. Courtlandt said, "Well, sir, is that all you have to tell? You have left your hero—for I see you are by way of heroizing him ('Right you are!' he ejaculated under his breath)—in what you would call, I suppose, a tight place and your audience in suspense."

"Oh," he replied with a relishing twinkle in his eyes, "I was afraid I was talking too much. I've been regularly going on at score."

"Ah, yes," she said; "would you mind asking my husband to come to me for a moment?"

"Won't you let me finish my story?" asked Jack, fairly caught.

"Oh, certainly," she replied, looking at him with an amused smile, "if it's not too long. Well?"

"Well," he said, "I anticipated the sequel in the first chapter. You remem-

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ber my saying what happened last week and how things went everlasting to sm-smash?"

"Yes," she replied; "it was a most forcible description."

"Well," he went on, "'Alexander and S. T.' headed the procession. It was the break in it; it went to eighty and he sold ten thousand more, that started the whole thing; and one time last Friday that happy union of conqueror and s-saint was grassing around among the d-daisies to the tune of *one-thirty*."

"Did Mr. Strathmore lose much?" she asked, nonchalantly, looking about the room.

"Lose much! L-lose much!" cried Jack, with a gesture of despair. "Oh, Father Abraham! catch me ever again undert-taking to make a woman——"

She turned and looked at him for an instant, and they both broke into a hearty laugh (her own so light-hearted that she wondered at the sound). "'To make a woman,' you were saying, Mr. Young?" she queried.

“‘Don’t b-break the b-bruised reed,’” he pleaded. “But,” he said, “just one word: I asked Blenkins about the deal first chance I got. ‘How did Blaik behave,’ I said, ‘when “A. and S. T.” struck eighty?’

“‘He was scared out of a year’s growth, and I don’t blame him,’ says Blenk.

“He’s the most altogether all round man *I* ever saw,” added Jack, musingly. “I’d like to tell you of something that happened at the club awhile ago, though you mightn’t like it any more than you do this stock business.”

“If it is about Mr. Strathmore,” she added, “perhaps we had better postpone it to another occasion; and if I’m to hear any more of your dramatic narratives, I shall have to ask you to find me a seat. Did you happen to notice what became of Mr. Courtlandt?” (She had caught a passing glimpse of him earlier.)

“Saw him apparently on his way to the supper-room with Mrs. Belthorp,” said

Jack, with cheerful mendacity. "He's all right. This wall seat's a beautiful place for narrations,—can't any one l-look over your shoulder while you're t-talking. Are you quite sure you wouldn't like something to eat?" he asked.

"I am, thanks," she replied; "and you?"

"Quite so," he added, sententiously. "At my age one does not trifle with digestion. I have had my dinner. Later on, if you like, I may try 'tired N-nature's sweet restorer'—the b-balmy 'B. and S.'; but at present I am sustained by the c-consciousness of—of——"

"Yes," she said, "you look very conscious, and I suspect you were about something too presuming even for you."

"I suppose I have my l-limits," he replied, meekly. "You have probably saved my life, and if you think the re-m-mainder of it would be of any use to you,"—leaning on his arms with hands clasped between his knees, he looked up side-ways at her with a little smirk,—

"you might have it altered over a bit. Some of it is g-good yet," he suggested.

"Are you really serious, Mr. Young?" she asked.

"Serious!" exclaimed Jack. "I'm so s-serious that, unless t-taken in t-time, I'm almost invariably fuf-fatal."

The servants were going about with trays of ices and punch for those who did not care for the salads and champagne of the supper-room.

In the long music-room which opened into the conservatory were a dozen couples of indefatigable dancers taking advantage of its comparative emptiness. Mrs. Courtlandt was looking at the waltzing pairs, still smiling at Jack's last absurdity. Glancing at her face, he saw the smile suddenly give place to a look of alert attention. Involuntarily his gaze took the direction of hers. Lillian Moore was hurriedly crossing the ball-room alone from the direction of the conservatory door, through which, a moment later, entered Ernest Courtlandt,

who stopped with an air of embarrassment and surveyed the room.

Jack noticed that his companion turned her face as if she did not wish her husband to know that she had seen him.

Ernest hesitated a moment, looking in the direction that Mrs. Moore had taken, and then, moving towards the entrance of the ball-room, caught sight of his wife and Jack and came towards them.

"Will you get me a glass of water, please," said Mrs. Courtlandt, and Jack darted away.

"Haven't you had about enough of this?" said Ernest, with rather an assumed air of weariness as he came up to her. "I have! I had an idiotic notion that some of these people might be amusing. I suppose I forgot, in the two months we were away, what a lot of duffers they were; but I've been jolly well reminded of it to-night. I think I'll go down to the 'Century,'" he added; "I must get some of the frumps out of my mind or I shall dream of them."

"I fancied you might be enjoying yourself," she said. "Mr. Young said he saw you on the way to the supper-room with Mrs. Belthorp."

"Mrs. Belthorp !" he exclaimed. "Oh, yes ; Mrs. Belthorp. Humph ! how did he come to say that ?" he demanded quickly ; "was he volunteering information or have you been setting him up to watch my movements ?" he asked with angry suspicion. "I haven't spoken to Mrs. Belthorp to-night !"

"Haven't you, dear ?" she said. "Then Mr. Young was mistaken, of course."

"Did you ask Young where I was ?" he insisted, with growing irritation.

"I think I did ask him if he had seen you," she replied, "but," putting out her hand, deprecatingly, as if to lay it on his arm, at which he drew back, "it was merely an idle question. Believe me, Ernest, I have not spied upon you nor watched you. Why should I ? I do not lay any restraint upon you, do I ?" And, with an almost piteous appeal in her

voice, "I do not ask anything of you,—that you should do anything or refrain from anything for me."

"Maybe you don't," he exclaimed, feeding his anger upon her gentleness, which he tried to fancy was intended to provoke him ; "but if you *don't*, it's because you care nothing for what I do, or what I am, or what I may be. I am sick and tired of your high-and-mighty, superior, touch-me-not puritanicalism. I suppose I can't expect anything else from you. But," he went on, regardless of her look of pained, incredulous surprise, "there is one thing we can settle once for all,—my notions about some things may not square with yours, but I consider myself the best judge of the propriety of my own actions, and if you think you can get on with me on any other line, you are making the mistake of your life."

She sat rigidly still for a moment after he finished, and then, rising deliberately from her seat, looking first over one shoulder and then over the other, she

arranged the train of her dress and then gave the front of her skirt a little smooth.

Looking at her face from under his sullen brows, he saw there an expression which he had never seen before, and he felt his unreasonable anger give place to something very like consternation. He had struck harder than he meant.

Having adjusted her gown to her satisfaction, she raised her head. She was rather above the middle stature of women, and it needed only to throw her head back a little to bring the glance of her half-shut eyes on a level with his. "You have convinced me," she said at last with slow, incisive clearness, "of the gravity of my mistake ; but you have, if you will pardon me for correcting you, misdated it ; it was *made six years ago !*"

In the meantime, Jack's quest for water had been successful, but not until he had occasion to remark that "he believed you could get any b-blamed thing at all to drink in this house b-but water ; and he

wished that those foreigners who thought the American people never quenched with anything else could just tackle the situation at Mrs. Stephenson's." As he came back with the glass, he noted Ernest's sullen face and Beatrice with her head thrown back as she spoke and turned away; he said to himself, "Looks as if Master Ernest was a getting of his c-come-up-inses. 'Bout time, too, and serve him right! G-good deal more fun hunting the t-tiger than having him hunt you." He gave the glass to a servant and went up the stairs.

When Beatrice came out of the cloak-ing-room, she found him with his overcoat on standing in the upper hall, with a look of studied vacuity on his face. And as she would have passed him on her way down, he said, "Oh, Mrs. Courtlandt, if you are g-going, you'll let me put you into your carriage, m-mayn't I? I'm simply paralyzed with fatigue; but if you can help me a little, I can k-keep up appearances; and," he pleaded as they went

down together, "to set me down at the club will save the expense of an ob-b-bituary in the m-morning papers."

"You dear little ugly thing!" she said to herself, touched by his transparent thoughtfulness. "I hope some woman will be very fond of you, some day."

"You may put me into my carriage, thank you," she said, looking at him with a smile; "but I think you ought to walk for your health."

"Perhaps you're right about my w-walking," said Jack, as he handed her into the coupe; "g-good fellows are getting awfully sc-scarce."

"Yes," she said, "you must take care of yourself; I must hear the rest of your tale, you know."

"Delighted!" cried Jack, as the carriage started away.

CHAPTER IV.

“ ‘What is this life?’ it ’plained; ‘what masquerade
Of which ye all are witnesses and part?’ ”

ERNEST COURTLANDT stared after his wife as she turned and swept across the room, conscious of nothing for the moment except the bewilderment of a stunning blow.

It comes to most people at least once in their lives that the one thing of which they have taken no account as possible, the one consequence against which no guard has been raised, shall happen. It had happened to him, and his first collected thought revealed to him that, whether for better or for worse, his life would never be quite the same again.

He could not at first remember her words to him, nor just what had occasioned them.

He only saw her face, with its expres-

sion of contemptuous anger, of which the recollection brought the scalding blood to his face to be driven back to his heart as he recalled what she had said and realized the completeness of her revolt.

The thought was intolerable. Every fibre of his wounded vanity burned with an unendurable smart.

It was amazing, incredible. His mind began to travel over the events of the evening.

He remembered with a guilty twinge that within the half-hour he had passionately deplored the "mistake which took place six years ago" in almost the same words his wife had used, and he started at the thought that in some way it had come to her and she had quoted his phrase, words that he felt would well explain his wife's revolt if she knew of them; and he recalled with a sort of revulsion the passion which had evoked them.

He had always taken her love for him

for granted. Any doubt that he might not be the one person in the world for her would have been inconceivable to him, and, though there had often been times when he had thought that he wished that she did not love him, it had never occurred to him for an instant to question that she did.

Even when once he had reproached her with not really caring for him, he had not believed it true. It was simply that for the moment he craved the freedom which he felt her indifference would partly justify. Of his own feeling for his wife, he had long ceased to think very much. His passion for her rival included no dislike to her.

Indeed, he was proud of her beauty and cleverness. He enjoyed the unmoved serenity with which she received the attentions of other men and the admiration which was bestowed upon her.

He had at bottom a great opinion of her abilities, and his confidence in her discretion was complete.

He was, too, very dependent upon her. Perfectly mistress of affairs, no detail of his establishment had ever been allowed to intrude upon him ; and, studiously acquainted with all his tastes and idiosyncrasies, he had found even his whims anticipated.

And in the whirl of his thoughts at the moment it came to him, with a feeling of unwonted and remorseful tenderness, how, in the serious illness of his life, he had never opened his eyes without meeting her look of watchful and loving solicitude.

How different was the look in her eyes just now, and the dilated nostrils,—the scornful mouth. “God !” he exclaimed to himself as he recalled the tone of her voice. “I wonder if she really meant what she said. It isn’t possible. What did I say to her? No, it wasn’t that ; she has forgiven worse things than that, many’s the time.”

He would go after her and ask her to take him home. He would say that he

was tired and cross and all that, and ask her to forget his irritable words. "No! I'm hanged if I do," he said to himself, with a reaction. And indeed it was too late, for he saw his wife cloaked and hooded, with Jack Young in attendance, on her way out of the house.

She did not turn her eyes towards him, but he saw her smile at some remark of Jack's.

"Damn the little fool!" he exclaimed, audibly.

"For whose future happiness is that aspiration, Mr. Courtlandt?" came to him in a woman's voice, and, turning, he saw Miss Kate Sear standing at his elbow, arm-in-arm with Mrs. Wheeler, and both looking at him with subdued amusement.

"Might have been any one of a lot of people," he replied. "I didn't see you at all," he added, and was instantly conscious of the awkwardness which was so quickly taken advantage of.

"Oh, no! Mrs. Wheeler and I are

sizes and sizes too large, aren't we, Sue?" she said, with a laugh. "We knew you didn't mean either of us."

"I saw Beatrice here a moment ago," said Mrs. Wheeler, insincerely; "she hasn't gone, has she? I wanted to speak to her."

He looked up at her with frowning suspicion for an instant, and replied, "Yes, I think she has left the house by this time; she was complaining of a bit of headache, and we both argued that we'd had enough of this sort of thing. I'm off, too," he added. "Good-night."

"Good-night," they duetted sweetly as he turned away.

"Our engaging friend seems rather put out about something," remarked Mrs. Wheeler, as he retired. "Sort of 'take-my-doll-and-go-home frame of mind,' as Jack Young would say," she added with a little laugh; and then, turning to Miss Sear, said, with a solemn shake of the head, "Kate, never marry a young man!"

"Thank you, my dear," she replied, "I

never have, and, as matters are going now, I fancy by the time my turn comes the men will all be dead of old age."

"And serve them right!" said Mrs. Wheeler, laughing.

"And serve them right!" repeated Kate, joining in the laugh. "There will be some satisfaction in out-living them, anyway. But, seriously, why did you say that? Don't you like Ernest Courtlandt?"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Wheeler; "I like,—that is to say, I don't dislike him. He does not interest me particularly, except that he is Beatrice's husband. But then," she added, reflectively, "he has never had much of a chance, and he has been sorely tried."

"What do you mean?" asked Kate, with a puzzled frown.

"I love Beatrice Courtlandt," exclaimed Mrs. Wheeler, ignoring Miss Sear's question.

"Do let's sit down. I'm tired to death."

They settled themselves upon the wall seat. Mrs. Wheeler bent over to make sure that her dainty silk shoes and stockings were invisible or not too visible. Leaning a little forward, she vibrated her fan slowly up and down between her clasped hands.

Miss Sear leaned back, her hands crossed in her lap, her face turned towards her companion, waiting for her to speak, her own impulse of question restrained by the knowledge that if she interrupted the silence her whimsical friend would be more than likely to change the subject.

"I love Beatrice Courtlandt," at last reiterated Mrs. Wheeler. "She doesn't know it," she added, with a little sigh, "and she wouldn't believe it if I told her. But I do !

"She looks upon me as a sharp-tongued, cynical woman ; and perhaps I am," she reflected, with a shrug, lifting her eyebrows. "But," she continued, bracing herself upon her knee with her closed fan

held in both hands, "I would have been her good friend if she would have let me.

"I have known Ernest Courtlandt from boyhood," she went on rapidly. "He was an only child, and was consistently and systematically spoiled and pampered from the cradle up. His father died while he was a child, and his mother, until she died, just lived and moved in him. Everything has given way to him all his life. You asked me just now what I meant by his not having much of a chance. Well, do you understand?"

Kate nodded.

"After his mother's death," Mrs. Wheeler resumed, "and before, for that matter, he had more money than anybody ought to have, in my opinion.—Oh, yes," she said, in answer to Miss Sear's smile, "but it's my husband's money. I spend it from a sense of duty.—If you smile any more in that sort of a way, Miss ——"

"Oh, go on, Susan," said Miss Sear; "don't be provoking. You know what

we saw to-night. What is there about that?"

"‘That,’" Mrs. Wheeler replied, "was the one thing in which his mother balked him. She was Lillian Beckwith. Her father was at one time a partner of his father; when Ernest and Lillian were children, and after the separation,—I mean the dissolution of partnership,—Mr. Beckwith went down and Ernest's father went up the hill.

"When Ernest came home from college he met his old playmate, who had just left school, and fell in love with her. To do her justice, I think that even as a child she had been in love with him. At any rate, they were both thoroughly in earnest,—as, alas, only very young people can be," she added, musingly, and looking up caught Miss Sear's glance bent upon her in sympathetic conjecture. "Yes!" she said; "once, years ago. Yes; once, years ago, and you?" putting her left hand into Kate's lap, who took and pressed it in both her own.

"Yes, I too," said Kate. "I have a 'faded flower' somewhere among my belongings."

"Where is he?" said the elder woman, reckless of her pronouns, "and why——"

"Did he go away?" suggested Miss Sear, with a shrug.

"Yes," exclaimed the other.

"Because," said Kate, "because I was——" (shutting her teeth with a snap) "because I let him,—helped him,—made him get on his feet. Oh," she said, giving her companion's hand a push, "go on with your narrative. We shall both be crying directly, and tears are awfully unbecoming to me. Only brunettes can cry prettily in public."

"Well," said Mrs. Wheeler, "I'll be as unpathetic as it's in my nature to be without cramping my literary style."

"Old Mrs. Courtlandt," she resumed, "found out the state of things, which didn't in the least suit her views for Master Ernest. She was an old fool in most ways, but she was as cunning as the

Father of Sins himself, and she contrived—I believe she hired Lillian's mother—to get the girl packed off West somewhere, without a word of good-bye to Ernest, and, to make him believe that she had been playing the flirt with him.—If he had been ten years older," she added, "he would have followed her up and got the truth from her own lips."

"Poor girl!" said Kate. "If she had been ten years older, she wouldn't have gone at all."

Neither spoke for a moment or two. From the music-room came the strains of "Auf Wiedersehn."

Kate Sear still sat with her head leaning back, her hands crossed in her lap.

"Are you going to finish the story of the lives and partings of 'E' and 'L'?" she asked.

"I wish to heaven I could finish the story!" was the reply. "You know the other thing we saw to-night. The child was at bay! Splendid! I hated him. I remember," she went on, reminiscently,

“when he brought her back here,—a bride,—the fair sweet thing, so sure of herself and so sure of him.

“After that other performance and his mother’s death, which occurred not very long afterward, he went off to Europe, and travelled about there and elsewhere for two or three years. Beatrice is from Philadelphia, you know ; but she really made her *début* here,—’twas here he met her.

“About the time she would have come out, her mother died, and she was just twenty when she made her first appearance, under the chaperonage of her aunt.

“There was no one to compare with her that season. Ernest Courtlandt had returned from his travels and went everywhere. He was considered a great ‘catch,’ and her aunt took care that they should be thrown very much together. He was very rich ; he is very handsome ; and, at his best, he has very taking ways.

“And then, too, people had not quite forgotten the history of his boyish love

affair, which was well calculated to reach the heart of such a girl as Beatrice Ingersoll. She is a born combination of Ida Lewis and Florence Nightingale, and the idea of consoling anybody would fascinate her. The men were all wild about her. She was perfectly beautiful and charming,—and Ernest Courtlandt wanted her, just as he always wanted every pretty thing he saw, and which, in fact, he pretty much always managed to get. They were engaged before spring.”

“Was he in love with her?” said Kate.

“Oh, I suppose so,” was the reply; “after a fashion,—after his fashion. It suited his vanity to feel that he had carried off what all the other men coveted; and then he must have been more or less in love with her. He couldn’t have helped it. She was too lovely——”

“And she?” queried Miss Sear.

“You will have to ask me an easier one,” said Mrs. Wheeler, with a shrug of her shoulders. “Some years before I

was born, a person by the name of Solomon gave up just such a riddle as that.

"But," she added, "I suppose she must have thought so or she wouldn't have married him; and, as I told you, he was very handsome and attractive.

"She is a person," Mrs. Wheeler went on, "whom I conceive to have an overpowering sense of duty and capable of an immense tenderness; one of those women who are, on the whole, more likely than not never to be 'in love,' or never to realize, in all that it means, what love is.

"Such a woman may live with a man for years,—all her life, perhaps,—without its even occurring to her that she is capable of any feeling that she has not experienced.

"She acquires a habit of duty and affection which serve her for love,—no, which passes for it with her,—and it requires a revelation, no less, and an undermining shock as well, to open her eyes."

“‘He that is robb’d, not wanting what is stol’n,—let him not know’t, and he’s not robbed at all,’” quoted Kate. “Don’t you think people are better off without earthquakes?”

“My taste that way would be very quickly satisfied,” she said; “and, as for revelations, my curiosity is of too mild a type.”

“But I will ask you what you meant when you said that Ernest Courtlandt had been sorely tried.”

“He has always, more than almost any person I know of,” replied Mrs. Wheeler, “had his own way; and that’s the sorest trial there is. Do you understand? No nature is strong enough for that.

“I do not want to be too hard upon him, nor to prejudice you against him,” she continued. “He has a lot of good qualities, and I could find it in my heart to like him better if I didn’t love his wife so much. Oh, dear,” she sighed, “I made a stupid mistake at the outset, and I’ve

never got within arm's length of her since."

"What was it?" said Kate, leaning forward and looking at the face of her companion. "I didn't suppose she could feel so much about anything," was her thought. "What did you do?"

"Oh, I undertook to advise her," exclaimed Mrs. Wheeler. "I went to see her one day after she had been married two or three months,—one afternoon. It was storming furiously. I remember it all so well, and after greeting me she said, 'Do let me have your men sent away for an hour. Stay and have a cup of tea with me. I'm sure nobody else will come in this sudden storm, and we shall have a good talk. You are one of Ernest's oldest friends, and I'm anxious to know everybody whom he knows.'

"'Thank you,' said I, 'let's have the tea by all means, but the men can stand it, I guess.' Mistake number one. She thought I wasn't nice to my servants ; but she rang for tea, and we made ourselves comfortable.

"I had never caught her alone before, and I had fallen in love with her, as I told you. I conceived the fatuous notion of imparting some of my hard-earned worldly wisdom. The conversation naturally drifted to her brand-new husband, and she seemed to regard me not only as an old acquaintance of Ernest's, but as a staid and elderly married woman, who might enlighten her as to the duties and perplexities of brides. Oh, you may laugh," she cried, giving her head a toss.

"I didn't laugh, my dear," said Kate, leaning forward and putting her hand-palm up in her friend's lap. Mrs. Wheeler laid her fan on the seat and put both her hands in Kate's.

"What did you tell her?" said the younger woman.

"Well, to come to the point," was the reply, "I said something like this: 'My dear, I have known your husband all his life. He is generous, warm-hearted, amiable, and if he have any faults they came of his having been a little too much

petted. Men,' I said, 'value a thing a good deal by the difficulty of achieving it. Don't make it too easy for him! Keep something in reserve. Oppose him a little sometimes, even when you would prefer to yield.' "

The speaker was acting the scene over again. She paused until her friend said, "Well?"

She lifted her hands from Kate's clasp and took up her fan.

"Well?" said Miss Sear.

"She turned her face to me," said Mrs. Wheeler, "with something of the look we saw in it to-night when she stood facing her husband, and she said: 'I don't want to know what you mean, and yet I do! You mean that I should act the coquette to my husband! I am ashamed to understand you.' "

"Pleasant for you," said Miss Sear, sympathetically. "What did you say?"

"Say!" ejaculated Mrs. Wheeler, whose face was crimson; "what was there to say in the face of such innocence as that?"

"I simply crawled out of the house, thanking my stars that I had kept my men waiting. Hasn't it occurred to you that I have done a good deal of the talking?"

"Yes," said Miss Sear, putting her fan to her mouth as they rose to go ; "I have held my tongue till it aches."

CHAPTER VI.

“There never was a night that had no morn.”

MRS. COURTLANDT leaned back wearily in the corner of her carriage and closed her eyes.

During the few days since her return she had begun to hope that she might eventually hit upon a plan of life which would be endurable, and which in time, as she grew older, she thought might take the place of that which had been so cruelly frustrated.

The resumption of her wonted life, with its customary occupations and duties, had reassured her to a degree. Everything seemed so usual that at times she had almost forgotten that anything had occurred to unsettle her.

But now she realized more keenly than at any time how wholly—save in the

ordinary matters of routine—the old order of things had passed, and that the greatest change of all was in herself.

The words with which she had parted from her husband came to her mind, and she recalled with a feeling that was almost contemptuous the look of amazed consternation in his face. But her anger had spent itself in one quick flush ; she had been “at bay” for one brief moment only. She did not regret her rebellion. Her sense of justice had been outraged, and her wrath had been righteous ; but she experienced a sinking sense of defeat and despair that the self-control upon which her whole scheme had rested had given way at the first strain. She had miscalculated her strength ; she could not trust herself.

“Oh,” she thought, “what is my life to be? Always like this? Six years! Six years ago! How will it be after six years more? I am young and strong. How many years shall I have to live? It will never be any easier ; it must be harder.

"It was horrible to be so angry," she thought. Never had she been so with him before, not even on that dreadful day.—Oh, but she might be so again, she felt. Yes, but never, never—and she shut her teeth together—would she show it; never would she so speak to him as she had spoken that night. And then there came like a stab a misgiving that they might have been remarked—overheard.

She tried to recall the scene, to remember if she had raised her voice,—how loudly he had spoken,—his look,—her own. She imagined herself the subject of the cynical comment which she had so often heard made upon other women, and the thought was unspeakably repugnant to her.

How could people jest about such things. How little, how mean, how hateful and cruel was life.

And then there came to her, by some association of ideas, the kind, strong face of the man she had met that night for the second time only as the face of a friend.

He had said that life was worth having ; that it was good. What did he know that could give her any comfort ? He seemed so thoughtful and wise ; surely he would know something to help.

He had been so quick to anticipate her thought, and there was that about him,—perhaps it was what he said, perhaps it was the personality of the man himself,—which had given her confidence, and for the time a sense of strength and serenity. He seemed like one who had had trouble and overcome ; who had suffered and found strength. For the second time that night she recalled his words to her : “I think I could be a good friend to a woman if she cared to have me,” and her reply.

The thought comforted her. She need not tell him anything about herself and her trouble,—she fled from the thought,—but she felt that if she should see him once in a while he could help her to some plan of existence which might be in her power to compass.

Roberts met her at the door with the announcement that Marion was awake and wanted her,—she thought she had a little fever, perhaps.

“How long since?” demanded Mrs. Courtlandt, every other thought driven instantly from her mind as she hurried up the stairs.

“About an hour, m-maybe three-quarters,” was the reply as the maid hurried after her flying mistress. “We sent Charles for the doctor, Mrs. Courtlandt. He ought to be here by now.”

The child had never had a serious illness, and had, in fact, escaped even the miserable ailments called children’s diseases.

The mother sped along to the nursery, her imagination on fire with suggestions of scarlet fever and diphtheria, and every horror, her heart sick with terror, and flung herself down by the little creature tossing upon the tiny white bed. But she got no response to her appeals and endearments except half-articulate moans

for "mamma," which her passionate protestations that "mamma was there" did not still.

She was in an agony of apprehension. "Oh," she thought, "is this, too, to be taken?"

The child could not or would not answer any questions, or give any indication as to how or where it was in pain; and all that the nurse could tell was that she had wakened, crying for her mamma, and had said once, "Marion's head hurts."

"What have you done for her? Anything?" demanded Beatrice. "How long ago did you send for the doctor?" And then, with the unthinking instinct to do something, she caught the child from the bed and pressed it passionately in her arms, as if to interpose herself between it and danger.

"I just bathed her head a bit, as much as she'd let me," replied the nurse. "She didn't seem to want to be touched. Children are often like that," she added,

"when they are sick ; they don't seem to want to be bothered like with touching 'em and asking questions of 'em. I think the doctor'll be here directly, ma'am."

Marion moved uneasily in her mother's arms, throwing her head and arm back as if in protest of restraint, but Beatrice still held her, trying in vain to elicit some response to her tenderness.

It was really but a few moments before the doctor came, but how long they seemed can only be imagined by those who have yearned such ones over a sick child.

"Oh, doctor," she cried, as he came into the room rubbing his hands, palms together, as if to warm them, "I'm so glad you have come! Marion is frightfully ill it seems to me." And corroboratively, "I can't get her to speak a word to me, or to let me know what ails her."

"Um-m-m," said the doctor, "let's have a look at her," drawing a chair in front of Mrs. Courtlandt and taking the child's hand in his. "A little more to the light.

Humph! little bit feverish," then gently pulling down the lower eyelid and looking at the lining.

The child opened her eyes wide at his touch and the sound of a new voice.

"Eyes look pretty well," he said, as she shut them, after a brief stare, and turned her face towards her mother.

"Let me see her tongue," he said; and after much coaxing she was at last induced to give him a fleeting inspection of that tiny member, enough to see that it was brightly red on the edges and rather white in the middle.

"Now put her back on the bed," said the doctor. "We'll take a look at her back and chest. Let me have the light, please. So,—ah, yes, that will do," as he covered her, and she turned over with a little flounce.

The doctor turned to Mrs. Courtlandt with a smile, in which his professional manner seemed to disappear.

"You've been out this evening," he said, with a glance which took in her

shining dress, the jewels on her neck and in her hair, and the sweet, anxious face upon which, in answer to his own, a faint smile was dawning.

"Stephenson's? Yes? Mrs. Glenning went, and I rather hoped to get in myself for a few minutes,—about supper-time, you know. Were there a great many there?"

The little figure on the bed gave a toss under the coverings.

"Yes," she replied, absently, starting at the child's movement. "I believe so. Oh, yes, there were a great many people. Doctor, you don't think she is alarmingly ill, do you?"

"She'll be all right in a day or two," he said in reply. "Want to be a little careful about what she eats." Looking up sharply at the nurse, "Been eating anything unusual yesterday or to-day?" he asked.

The nurse flushed as both the doctor and her mistress eyed her.

"Hey?" said he.

"Mr. Courtlandt brought her a big box

of candy yesterday, sir," she replied, looking at the floor.

"What kind of candy?" said the doctor; "nuts, and candied fruits, and all that kind of mischief, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," she admitted, "there was nuts in it, and those sort of green things. I told Mr. Courtlandt, sir," with a deprecating look at her mistress, "that Mrs. Courtlandt didn't like to have her eat such things, but she'd seen the box and was wild for it, and he said let her have it, it wouldn't hurt her. He'd been brought up on candy, he said, sir."

"Guess you knew pretty nearly what ailed her all the time, didn't you?" said the doctor, with a sarcastic smile, glancing at Mrs. Courtlandt, at whose look of unrelenting censure the nurse began to weep, shaking in her shoes the while, and, after a moment, fleeing from the room with her apron to her eyes.

"Phew!" said the doctor to himself. "I could think of things I'd like better myself than to be looked at like that."

In his heart he did not blame the servant so much, and he said, "I don't believe you will have any more trouble of this sort with her. You might give your husband warning in the morning, though, —or give him a month's wages," he added, laughing.

"I suppose the new house is very fine, isn't it?" he asked, his interest in the "case" at an end again.

"Yes," she answered, "I think it struck me as being very handsome.—Do you think she is at all flighty? That there is anything the matter with her head?" she asked, forcing him back to what interested her. "You know I told you that she would not make any response to my questions or to my—anything I said to her, and that alarmed me more than anything. She is usually very affectionate and demonstrative."

"No," said the doctor, abandoning definitely all further attempts to change her subject, "nothing at all, nothing at all."

"But she did not appear to know me," persisted Mrs. Courtlandt. "She did not seem to want to have me hold her in my arms," with an inflection of grief in her voice.

"Oh, she knew you fast enough," he answered (as she thought) rather lightly, "but she hadn't the slightest appreciation of your feelings, and being languid and uncomfortable, did not wish to be touched or made to exert herself in any way. Children of that age are just like little animals, that's all," he insisted, answering her look of protest smilingly.

"Some of them are very beautiful and engaging little animals, and I know very well myself how they tug at our heart-strings; but we must not expect the quantity of love we give to them."

"Don't you think my child loves me?" she said, reproachfully.

"Not as you love her," he replied, gently; "not as much and not in the same way,—she has not learned. Part of your love she will return to you some

day, the other part she will pass on to her children. One part you will teach her, the other part nature will teach her as it taught you." He rose as if to go.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "aren't you going to give her any medicine?"

"Oh, yes," he said, smiling to himself. "Certainly, certainly. Two glasses about two-thirds full of water," to the nurse, who had stolen back into the room, "and two teaspoons, please. A teaspoonful every half-hour in alternation for the first two hours, and then every hour. Don't waken her for the remedies."

He slipped to the bed and laid his large, soft hand on the child's forehead.

"Is there any fever," asked Mrs. Courtlandt.

"A little bit,—little bit," he replied, turning away and buttoning his coat; "there's always more or less fever with these gastric disturbances. But," he added cheerfully, "she will be all right in a day or two, perhaps to-morrow. Good-night."

"Good-night, doctor," she said, putting out her hand. "I'm so much obliged to you for coming."

The doctor had dissipated the extremity of her alarm, but had by no means imparted to her his own freedom from apprehension ; and her distrust of the nurse-maid, who was standing dejectedly about, was unabated.

"Send Roberts to me with my dressing-robe," she said to her. "I will call you if I require you again."

The woman hesitated and made as if she would speak, but her mistress looked up at her with such unmistakable dismissal that she went silently away.

"Lord !" she said to Roberts, "haven't I been a-catching it, though !"

"What for ?" said Roberts.

"About the candy. I told you you ought to have kept it from her."

"Kept it from her !" cried the other, scornfully. "Who does she look like ? Do you suppose anybody ever kept anything from him ? Ugh !"

"What did she say?" asked Roberts, moving away with her mistress's robe.

"She didn't say a thing," replied the nurse; "she just looked at me."

Roberts found her mistress administering some of the harmless-looking liquid which the doctor had left, and said, as she assisted her to change her evening dress for the dressing-robe, "Mrs. Courtlandt, you're never going to sit up all night with the child. Harris or me can give her medicine and keep her covered up just as well as you can. That's all there is to do."

"I shall stay until I feel sure she is easier," said Mrs. Courtlandt. "You can lie on the lounge in my dressing-room. I shall not want Harris to-night."

One hour after another she sat in the low chair by the child's bed, alert to every movement and sound, until at last, as she bent over the little face, the regular soft breathing and the cool damp skin indicated that nature and doctor had won.

It was four o'clock,—darkest, coldest,

most down-hearted hour of all the twenty-four, when the vital tide is at its lowest ebb. But the relief to her mind gave her fatigue opportunity, and sleep came upon her.

The winter morning sunlight came in and kissed her eyes and warmed itself in her hair before she woke.

The door opened softly, and the nurse crept in followed by Roberts. "Oh, Mrs. Courtlandt," said the latter, "have you been up all night? Has she been very bad?"

"No," said Beatrice; "she has been asleep since about four o'clock, and seems to be quite nicely now. I have slept, too. Have some tea sent up, please. I shall undress and go to bed for a while."

"Please, Mrs. Courtlandt," said the nurse, timidly, "may I stay now? I'll take the best of care, and—and—I'm very sorry about the candy, ma'am, but you know, m——" she broke off with a deprecating look at her mistress, who said,—

"Yes, you may stay, Harris. I did not intend to be unjust to you. I was very

much frightened and disturbed last night, and perhaps I blamed you too much. I am going to my room now. Do not fail to call me unless she is quite bright when she wakes."

The tea and her bath refreshed her, but she could not sleep again. The disturbance of the evening, together with the excitement and fatigue of the night, left her languid and depressed; and the mood remained during the day, notwithstanding that when she went into the nursery at noon she found Marion sitting up in bed busy with playthings, apparently quite her own self again, and serenely unconscious of the anxiety and distress of which she had been the cause. Rather to her relief her husband did not appear during the day, dining at the club.

Though she had made up her mind to ignore the occurrence of the previous evening in her treatment of him, and knew that he would not allude to it himself, she had somewhat dreaded meeting him.

CHAPTER VII.

“So pocht das schicksal an die pforte.”

WHEN Mrs. Courtlandt entered her box the evening of the concert, the members of the orchestra were just settling into place. She seated herself a little back, and did not look about the house, but scanned the musicians with a listless recognition of those faces which she had learned to recognize, and the impassive countenance of the leader as he bowed to the greeting of the audience with a manner as if in reluctant deference to a foolish custom.

All the day she had looked forward to the evening to bring the sedative and stimulant which music was wont to afford to her, which should relieve the depression and soothe the irritable restlessness of her mood ; and it was with surprise

and disappointment that she found herself unmoved and untouched by the first movement, the beautiful, fantastically symmetrical "Allegro con brio." On the contrary, the tines seemed rather to exacerbate her unquietness, and instead of stilling, to send her mind in whirling quest of harassing suggestions.

She experienced a sensation which almost amounted to dismay when the movement ended.

"Fate, indeed, has knocked at my door," she thought, "if even music is to fail me."

As the strings were giving out the first subject of the "Andante," Strathmore came quietly into the box, and at her smile of recognition (rather a wan and autumnal smile he thought) and the suggestive movement of her skirt, he took the chair at her left without speaking.

She settled back and down a little, resting her chin lightly on her half-closed right hand, her face three-quarters full towards him, and with drooping lids

seemed to give all her thoughts to the music. He noted the line between her brows, the mouth drawn out of its curve droopingly at the corners, and the strained and weary expression of her whole face and attitude.

There was that in her face which he thought he understood. There had been a suggestion of it the night before, and a chance remark he had overheard had given him a clue.

A great pity, which was almost tenderness, filled his heart as he looked steadily at the beautiful downcast face and seemed to exhale from him towards her, and little by little as he gazed and the charming theme of the "Andante" developed and gave flower, he saw her face relax, the brow to clear, and the sweet mouth take on a tender and thoughtful smile; and, in a passage where the melody is interrupted by an irrelevant bit of whimsicality, she looked up brightly and met his smile with a little joy of laughter.

She turned slightly more away, and

again seemed absorbed in the music and unconscious of his gaze.

The music was depicted to him in the mobile face beneath his eyes, and as phrase and modulation followed each other, he read them there to the end of the movement, which concluded with an exquisitely affecting transmutation of the second theme, followed by a crashing crescendo and a cadence which brings the listener to earth again. She shook her head with a long, sighing breath.

"It had to come to clear the air," said Strathmore. "It was getting too dangerously beautiful."

"I am clapping my hands for joy," she exclaimed. "It has come back! I have not lost it." And in answer to his look, "It seemed to me during the 'Allegro,' and at the end of it, that the music was nothing to me and never would be anything again. It was disheartening, but it has all come back," she repeated, "and I have found myself again."

"The 'Scherzo' may unsettle you," he

said. "You must brace yourself against it."

"Yes," she replied, "it always makes me feel as if something mysterious and uncanny were trying to take possession of me; but I am fortified."

"You have described it exactly to my mind," he said, as the movement began.

Nothing more was said by either of them until the end. Both were fully under the spell of the wonderful thing. Never, she felt, had she listened with such satisfying delight. Never had every nuance of color and expression been so clear to her. And at the end, which comes with its triumphant march, she said to her companion, after a moment,—

"And it ends happily, after all."

"Yes," he replied.

"Slowly the doubts dissolve in clearer air; 'Bolder and grander the triumphal strain ascends. Heaven's light is glancing on the brow, and turns to boundless hope the old despair.'"

"It is partly his voice" was the thought

which came into her mind as he finished the quotation ; and with an impulse which sent the blood to her face, she half put out her hand towards him.

Perhaps he did not notice, for he made no sign, and said, simply, "Hastreiter comes next."

"Yes," she said ; "it will be almost too much after the symphony, the 'Che faro,' too. I think I shall go now. I do not wish my present mood disturbed."

"Do you think your carriage is here?" he asked ; "and if so, may I put you into it? I think you are right," he added. "I do not care for any more to-night."

"Thank you," she said, rising, "if you will be so kind. I told my men to come early, as I might wish to go before the end." She turned while he adjusted her wrap, and they went out together.

As they waited for her carriage to drive up from the line, she said, "Are you sure that I haven't dragged you away before you would have come?"

"Quite sure," he replied, smiling. "I

can go back, you know ; but I shall not. No !”

“You have had music enough for to-night, then?” she suggested.


He stared musingly into the street for a moment. “I have had as much as I shall,” he said. “Enough of anything is more than often a bit too much.”

The carriage drove up. The footman sprang down and opened the door. She stopped a moment before entering and, putting out her hand, said, “Will you come and talk to me sometimes? I am very often at home at five o’clock. Do you like your tea?”

“May I?” he cried, with a boyish eagerness. “I’ve an Oriental fondness for tea.”

“Come, then,” she said, smiling. “Good-night.”

He stood for a moment staring absently after the carriage. There was a fine drift of snow in the air, and a blast of wind came and drove the sharp crystals into his face.



He gave his head and shoulders an impatient shake and walked slowly towards the avenue.

It was as if the impact of the cutting particles had stung his consciousness and brought a reaction from the mood into which he had been led by the influence of the music and the presence of the woman from whom he had just parted. An unwonted sensation of discontent and *ennui* took possession of him. The night was young. It would be some hours before he could sleep ; but everything that occurred to him with which he might occupy the time struck him with keen disrelish.

He recalled the happenings of the day—how it had been spent—with a feeling of weariness and distaste of what seemed the purposeless triviality of it all ; and then remembered that all day he had been looking forward to the evening. Well, it had come—and ended. Was there anything to look forward to to-morrow ? or the next day ? or the next ?

He tried to interest himself in thinking

of some of the business affairs in which he was engaged, and thought that he cared nothing whether the ventures turned out well or ill. They were as little worth as anything else. Social engagements—yes! there were enough if he liked; but he felt a total lack of interest in them, or the people they included.

An overwhelming sense of depression and loneliness came upon him, to which he yielded with a feeling almost of fright at his powerlessness to resist.

It was unaccountable!

He was in perfect health; he had more money than he needed. He had no worries or apprehensions for himself or any one else. He was free; he might go or come, when or how, without accounting to any man. Was there anything he wanted that he could not have? And if so, what?

It was very cold. The air was full of fine prickly flakes. The wind alternately buffeted him in the face, or came shoving round the corners against his back. There came by contrast into his mind the scene

he had just quitted : the warmth, the glow of light, the luxury of sight and sound.

The melody of the "Andante" came to him, and he saw the beautiful bent face of his companion in the box. He saw again the expression of sadness give way to serenity and pleasure, and he felt again the exhaling sensation of the feeling with which for the moment he had been filled. . . . A thought came to him which stopped him in his tracks, and then sent him on with quicker pace.

"No !" he cried aloud, with a gesture,—and again "No !" as if to affirm his refusal to himself. . . .

"Will you come and talk to me sometimes?" she had asked. Why not? Oh, yes, he would be glad to do that,—there could be no reason why he should not do that. Had he not, in fact, asked her for her friendship, and offered his own? Pshaw! it was too absurd. "I, of all men," he thought, "and after all the years." Why could he not—why should he not—give himself the pleasure of the

society of this woman as often as he might, as she would? He was not a boy to fall in love with a fair face and a gentle manner. He had long passed the time "when all your thought is woman to win," and had come to that when "grizzling hair the brain doth clear."

He had known other women, both fair and charming, whom he had liked well, and who, he knew, had liked him well; and yet he could "dip his nose in the Gascon wine" without any *arrière pensée* at all.

In any case it would be but a short time,—a few months,—and he would be off again. He might never see her after that. "Nonsense!" he said to himself, with a smile that was grimly lightsome.

His mood had changed. As he strove on up the avenue it occurred to him that he would go to the club; perhaps he might get into a game of whist, and he felt, too, that there would be relish in a cigar. At any rate there would be some of the men he knew.

"What good fellows most of them are, too!" he thought.

CHAPTER VIII.

“There are plenty of acquaintances in the world, but very few real friends.”

THE next afternoon Beatrice took her usual drive through the park and by the river-side. The cold air brought a glow to her cheeks. Wrapped in sable she looked very queenly. So thought John Strathmore as he passed her on his high-stepping bay.

As she watched the river, her thoughts ran something like this: What sort of thing was this love,—this theme of poetry and romance,—the contemplation of which had at times stirred her imagination? Was it anything like the erotic sense which so far from being a temptation to her, excited only her contempt?

Was there anything better? Of course anything was better than that,—even the

half-contemptuous affection which married people, for the most part, even the happiest, seemed to have for each other. Was there anything better than that?

There might be, but she had come to know that it had never come to her, and to feel that it never would.

No, she had read of it, fancied it, dreamed of it, perhaps, but she was prepared to doubt if there were any such thing, and to decide that in any case it was not for her. Fate, circumstance, had so ordered her life that she would never know.

"Heigh-ho, the queen holly," she murmured to herself. "Most friendship is feigning; most loving mere folly."

She had forgotten her own passionate outcry of regret and despair when she had discovered herself unloving as well as unloved one day not long before.

A few days after the concert, Mr. Strathmore availed himself of the opportunity offered him by Mrs. Courtlandt,

and at the tea hour made his way leisurely towards her house.

He stopped to say a few words to Mrs. Cabot, who was coming out as he entered. She seemed delighted to see him, and said, as she ran down the steps, "You are very fortunate ; this is the first time I ever found Beatrice alone at this hour."

As he entered the drawing-room, that same curious feeling came over him that this was of the past, not the present. Beatrice felt a throb of pleasure as she saw him enter, and greeted him cordially. As he took her hand he said, "Am I venturing too soon upon your kindness? you said afternoon, and mentioned tea, you know."

"I am very glad to see you," she replied, "and I will keep 'the letter of the bond' and give you tea."

As he took the cup he felt a sensation of content envelop him. How fair she was ! how dainty, and withal how clever ! Their talk was upon the last new novel,

which was exciting a good deal of discussion. Some European cities they had both seen ; and in general such as two well-read and travelled people would discuss in the early stages of an acquaintance that each felt might develop into something more intimate later on, which feeling insensibly gave tone to the manner of their conversation. Each began to feel that the acquaintance had already got below the surface, and Mrs. Courtlandt found herself speaking to him of herself and her thoughts in a way and to an extent wholly unaccustomed for her.

After he went away she confessed to herself that of all the men she knew this stranger was the most charming to talk to or listen to, as the case might be. Before he left that afternoon he had said to her, "Will you forgive me if I venture to remind you that you promised to give me a trial?"

Beatrice did not reply at once. Strathmore watched her with a half smile in his eyes, which she caught as she turned her

face towards him. Flushing a little and smiling faintly, she said, "Yes, I remember."

They met very often during the winter, and once, when the subject of friendship came up, Beatrice asked the question, "Is it not doubtful if a real friendship can exist between a man and a woman? That is the prevailing belief, is it not? And few questions have been more debated."

"I can give you one opinion to the contrary," he replied, "and that, too, from a Frenchman from whom you would hardly expect it. Comte says that the only real friendship is between men and women, because the possibility of rivalry is eliminated."

"That is plausible as far it goes," she rejoined, "but I suspect that the elements which remain outweigh that consideration. You have not made out your case with your one authority. Do you know many more philosophers who hold that opinion? And suppose I were to ask you if it be your own?"

"I confess," he replied, "that weight of authority is against the affirmative; but if you were to ask me, I should make the best fight I could for that side of the case."

"As an advocate," she remarked, "who argues but doesn't give opinion. And I should be expected to discover your belief, I suppose, from the nature of your argument. I think you have answered the question. You do not believe that the relation can be."

"No," said Strathmore, "I have not answered it, but I will. I shall say that I do not know exactly what my belief is, as I have never had occasion to investigate the subject. I am not sure that it is a question which can be decided abstractly in any case; and the definitions of what friendship is might be almost as many and various as those who make them. Let us say that the possibility depends upon the two people involved in a particular case, which is to say that the relation is possible. So much is true, how-

ever, it seems to me, that a man might have towards a woman, or a woman for a man, all those feelings which if returned in kind would establish and maintain friendship. So far it is possible, at any rate. Do you not think so?"

"Perhaps," she said, a little absently.
And so they drifted.

CHAPTER IX.

“Because it was he ; because it was I.”

As balls and receptions followed each other in quick succession, with dinners and the opera, there was rarely a day that Mr. Strathmore and Beatrice Courtlandt did not meet.

Ernest was gratified that the lion of the season should be often at his house, and then, too, the strong personality of the man attracted him, as it did almost every one.

It became evident to Beatrice, early in their acquaintance, that they spoke the same language, and she grew to look forward to their meeting as the bright spot in her rather sombre days.

For two hours, one afternoon, there had been a procession of carriages at Mrs. Courtlandt's door, and more or less

of a crowd of women in her drawing-room.

She had been listening and replying to the commonplaces, welcomes, compliments, and ingratiations which had been addressed to her, with a complete sense of their insincerity, and yet a curious sense of enjoyment at her own flippancy of rejoinder and retort.

When the house was empty she went to her room, and with a delicious feeling of laying aside her insincerity with her gown, rested for an hour, and then ringing for her maid, arrayed herself for the *tête-à-tête* dinner with her husband in an Empire gown of violet velvet, the short waist defined by a girdle of antique silver, which she had picked up in Nuremberg, and which, as she clasped it, suggested a vague wonder what manner of woman had worn it years ago.

There had been no mention on the part of either herself or her husband of the episode at the Stephensons'. She had determined not to allude to it, and he

had repaid her forbearance by a deference which she neither quite repelled nor quite responded to.

Although she intended, so far as manner and action went, to ignore what had happened, she could not deny herself the satisfaction of defeating his tentative attempts, and leaving him in suspense as to how far he had succeeded in re-establishing himself.

He had gone out almost immediately after dinner, and, as was frequently the case, she was alone. She sat with her chin resting upon her hand, gazing musingly into the fire of drift-wood. Her thoughts turned to the women who had been at her house that afternoon, and she passed them mentally in review.

Was there, she wondered, among them all one whom she would like for a friend,—whom she could trust? She recalled her sensation of surprise that the two who had exhibited in their manner an almost affectionate cordiality were Mrs. Stephenson, whose quite unexpected proffer of a kiss

she had met with a wondering responsiveness, and Mrs. Wheeler, in whom she had divined a restrained impulse in the same direction, which she had not encouraged, but which she remembered with a certain pleasure.

Contrary to that person's belief, Mrs. Courtlandt was aware that Mrs. Wheeler was strongly attracted towards her, and would like to be very friendly, even affectionately so ; but the one had never gotten over the rebuff which she described to Kate Sear, and the other, with a certain compunctive perversity, had never been more than reservedly cordial.

But she had not forgotten. She had felt justified at the time ; but now, as she recalled the incident, she felt, not for the first time, that she had rather ignorantly rejected an overture of real kindness.

And she realized, too, that in the years that had elapsed she had learned to condone, if not exactly to entertain, some views of life which at one time she would have scornfully declined to listen to. She

acknowledged to herself that she had hardened a bit, or broadened a bit, and that now, alas! perhaps she would not only understand, but would not be ashamed to understand.

Yes, she could confess to herself that to a degree she had come, if not to share the lightness and the cynicism with which she had grown used to hear things treated,—things which she had been taught to regard as fundamental,—she had at least ceased to be shocked and revolted thereby. And, while feeling herself immeasurably above the influences and tendencies involved, she had come to feel that they were an inevitable part of the order of things to which she had grown accustomed.

Mrs. Courtlandt was aware that she was not exactly popular among the women of her society. She was admired and courted, and a good deal deferred to,—envied by some ; but she felt none of them were fond of her. Yes, there was one, Diana Cabot, who really seemed so ; but while she felt a certain kindly affection in return, there was

little in common between them, and she had small impulse towards the confiding attitude which would have pleased her friend.

Mrs. Cabot would say to her, "Beatrice Courtlandt, I don't believe you like me one bit! I'm always running after you and telling you everything, and I go away and remember that you haven't said one word about yourself. After all the years, I sometimes think I don't really know you any better than I did the first time I ever saw you. It isn't fair! It's awfully one-sided."

And Mrs. Courtlandt would say, "I'm very fond of you, my dear; but I'm a very commonplace sort of person. Nothing ever happens to me, and so I have nothing to tell. I'm sure we get on perfectly, do we not?"

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Cabot would reply, "and I like you better than any one; but I do wish sometimes you'd 'gush' a little."

She recalled something Mrs. Wheeler had once said of her, and which had been

repeated to her : " Popular ! Certainly not. For one thing, she hasn't that common ground of sympathy which consists of being envious of other people, and she is exasperatingly in-curious about their affairs. And the worst of it is that she is proud of it,—which, while a weakness, is not of the sort which commends her to the rest of us women. It isn't our kind ! Nevertheless, she's in a good school. We ought to be able to teach her—among us. The difficulty is, that small things don't tempt her. We needn't despair, however ; she's a woman ! "

" Of course," remarked the narrator, " I understood. It was just like Sue. She was vilipending the lot of us. She was, in her way, whipping us over your shoulders."

Mrs. Courtlandt admitted to herself that there was truth in the opinion. Yes, she knew she was proud, and " proud of her pride,"—proud of her scorn for so many of the things which seemed to make up the living interest of most of the women she knew. And yet she felt at the moment

that she had lost some of her shrinking at the things, *as such*. It was that they were so petty after all.

Whatever her ethical estimate had come to be of the temptations which seemed to assail and overcome others, for her they had no attraction of interest.

It was said, she knew, of this and that woman, that one was carrying on an intrigue with such a man, and one was in love with such an other ; but she would not listen to the gossip nor smile at the innuendoes. Once such things had shocked her ; now, she was fain to confess to herself, they only bored her ; and if her opinion of the women concerned was mean, her opinion of the men in whom they were interested was smaller yet.

She had to a degree ceased to wonder that the women were willing to risk the gossip and scandal of their affairs ; the wonder was that they were willing to incur anything for the men involved.

And, by a curiously contradictory view of the matter, her contempt was elicited by

the unseriousness of these affairs. They never amounted to anything. They were not worth while from any point of view.

The fire snapped and purred softly, throwing out little jets of colored flame. The murmurous rumble from the street seemed to make more perceptible the silence and quiet of the room, to emphasize it.

The gong and chimes of the clock in the hall rang out a musical announcement of the half-hour as the footman entered with a card.

"Show Mr. Strathmore in here," said Mrs. Courtlandt.

She rose and made a step forward to meet him with outstretched hand. "I am very glad to see you," she said, simply.

"Thank you, Mrs. Courtlandt," he replied, taking her offered hand for an instant.

"I am very much alone to-night in every way," she said, "but this afternoon has been full of women. Will you sit by

the fire? It has been keeping me company."

"And what has it been saying to you?" said Strathmore, as he took the chair she indicated. "Or has it maintained a friendly silence?"

"A discreet silence?" said Mrs. Courtlandt, smiling.

"No," he said, "a sympathetic silence,—and a very rare thing, too. How few people one knows with whom one can be silent without fear of being misunderstood!"

"That is most true," she said; "I do not myself know one, I think. I suppose it is that the people we know are not sure enough of themselves or of us to be silent, and take and let take for granted. What a lot of useless talk there is!"

"That isn't the worst of it," said Strathmore: "most undirected things are likely to be mischievous. It would be a great thing to learn to be quiescent as well as silent on occasions. Pascal, I think, said something like this: 'That

pretty much all the calamities which happen to men come of their inability to sit still in a chair.' ”

“That is to say,” she suggested, “that they cannot endure to be dull. Are you of his opinion?”

“I am very much of his opinion,” he said. “Dulness, I take it, is about the most persistent and mischievous enemy of man, and makes its attacks the earliest. You may have observed that even young children suffer acutely from it.”

“Yes,” she said, smiling, “I know of one small person whose sufferings from that source I am frequently called upon to alleviate. But would you say that it was alone impatience of dulness that makes men unwilling to sit still in a chair?”

“No,” he replied, “not absolutely, perhaps, but mainly in some form. It is the impulse to escape the sensation which gets them up. For example, the man of affairs, the business man, as we call him, and we may include some classes of the

professional man, whose devotion to his bank, counting-house, office,—shop of any kind, has excluded all care for other things, or knowledge of them, and finally all possibility of caring or learning one side of the switchless tramway of his vocation,—this man comes at last to the point where he should take to his chair, not only for his own sake, but if you like, for the sake of those affairs which have so long engrossed him. He says to himself that he deserves a rest. He has earned it, and the wherewithal to enjoy it; but he does not know how. Maybe he realizes that and keeps on. Often he breaks off, and, finding life intolerably dull, resumes; and in either case it is not seldom that, going beyond the endurance of his failing power and judgment, he undoes his life's work before he dies, and leaves the world the memory of failure merely: the rambling argument and pointless brief; the disappearance of a fortune; the senile will, which mocks and defeats the solicitude and endeavor of a

life's work, and precipitates his nearest and dearest into a sea of perplexity and distress, in which love and respect for him are drowned and lost."

"Yes," said Mrs. Courtlandt, "but don't you think that there are other causes besides the dread of dulness, or the inability to be dull with comfort, which impel men beyond their power to do their best? It seems to me that habit might account for the overdoing which you describe; I suppose that people do not always realize that they have changed very seriously until long after others have discovered it, and a very busy man not given to self-examination might not suspect that he was wearing out until the break came."

"That is true," he replied. "We grow old by heart-beats, not by years, and there is no outside dial to that clock. We have to look inside of it to find how much time has passed——"

"And to find out how much we have changed," she added to his sentence, "or

how much we have been mistaken in ourselves," she said, musingly. "We know ourselves, it seems to me, once in a while, as imperfectly as we know others, and it is dismaying at times to find the revelation of the 'John's John' so different from the 'real John.'"

"Yes," he said, "we do puzzle and disappoint ourselves at times exceedingly. It happens that the brave man—as he thought himself—finds, to his horror, that he has done a cowardly thing; the truthful man that he has done a deceitful one; and how we change in time we best discover at finding that the thing we have always derived and expect pleasure from pleases no longer; or, by finding ourselves, self-reproachfully, indifferent to people of whom we have been fond."

"Don't you think," said Mrs. Courtlandt, "that in the latter case we might find (it would mitigate the self-reproach) that they were indifferent to us as well?"

"Very probably," he admitted, smiling, "very likely, indeed."

"Our talk reminds me," she said, "of something in one of Arthur Helps's conversations or essays. I do not just remember which, for it is a long time since I read it, but he quotes another person something to this effect, and I may confess that I have found the quotation useful in some of my correspondence: 'It has been remarked that nearly all letters between friends, unless their friendship is of a very high order, begin with an excuse for not having written before;' but it goes on, 'there are some beautiful natures who neither make nor require excuses; you do not see these people for years, and they take you up precisely where they left you.' Do you think," she added, "that there are any people who neither make nor require excuses?"

"At most, no more," he replied, "than there are of those who can have friends with whom they feel no need on occasion for keeping up a conversation. The relation implied includes two people, and there must be a beautiful nature on each

side of it. I see you know the 'Friends in Council,' Mrs. Courtlandt. I always feel a little surprise to find any one who does, although I have always wondered that so few do know those charming people."

"I have the same experience and the same feeling about our mutual acquaintances. It is a pity that their circle should be so small, and I am constantly trying to get them into society," she answered.

"Don't your friends take to them?" said Strathmore, laughing. "I should think Mrs. Cabot, now, might help you in finding a footing for them."

She did not speak in reply, but looked up at him with a smile of great amusement.

"It had occurred to you, then?" he said.

"Not exactly so," she replied. "Mrs. Cabot said to me one day that she had thought of going in for a course of reading,—something improving, you know; not too deep, but sort of different, you

understand, and she thought I might give her some suggestions. There was a volume of the 'Friends' on my table, which she took up, saying, 'Is this something you are reading?' and opened it at random at the 'The Art of Living with Others.' 'The very thing,' she exclaimed; 'I've been having no end of bother with my housekeeper lately.'"

"Was it a joke?" asked Strathmore.

"Not in the least," said Mrs. Courtlandt; "sense of humor is not Diana's strong point. She got the book, but I never discovered if she read it. I asked her once how she liked it, but her reply was so pitifully evasive that I did not press her."

"Will you forgive me," said Strathmore, "that your intimacy with Mrs. Cabot—you know I have known her more or less from girlhood—seems odd to me? You cannot, I should say, have much of anything in common. I mean in the way of sympathies and tastes, particularly the latter, to build a friendship on."

"Perhaps not," Mrs. Courtlandt replied; "you are right as you put it, but——" she said, softly, after a little pause, "she is fond of me. I believe she would let me copy her last new gown," she added, laughingly.

"Is that all?" he said. "I should have said that there must be a great many who share that distinction."

"Of being fond of me?"

"Yes. It would seem very strange to me otherwise, if I may say so."

"I can't admit that it is quite *all*," she replied, "but it is a great deal, and I value her affection very much,—more of late, I think, than ever. I am not at all a popular person,—no" (to his look of surprise). "There have been a lot of women here this afternoon, and I was thinking of them when you came in and wondering, rather, if there were one of them who would be a friend to me if I cared to have her."

"I should say that you have touched the essence of the difficulty in those last

words, 'If I cared to have her,' " he said. "From a man's stand-point, I can hardly imagine your not attracting friends, if you care to do so."

"Thanks," she said, lightly. "That means, after all, that because a woman might be attractive to men she would be to women also. That does not follow at all, and views from a man's stand-point will not help me in the case, I fear."

"Perhaps you are right," he said, as he arose to say good-night. "You might ask Mrs. Cabot her views on the subject."

He raised his brows as he looked at his watch by the light of his cigar, as he hesitated a moment on the walk before deciding whether he would go home or to his club.

CHAPTER X.

“Lulled in the countless chambers of the brain,
Our thoughts are linked by many a hidden chain;
Awake but one, and lo! what myriads rise!
Each stamps its image as the other flies.”

THE quiet days of Lent had come, and one evening in the first week Strathmore was again calling at the Courtlandts'. Some remark of his led up to a question which Beatrice had in her mind, and, turning to him, she said, “There is something I should like to ask you, if I may.”

“Then there is something I should like to be asked,” he said.

“It is a bit personal,” she objected.

“So much the better,” he replied. “I shall be,—let me see—”

“No! no!” she broke in, joining in his laugh, “I do not want—I was not going to ask the date of your birth.”

“No?” said Strathmore. “That is rather a pity, for when your friend Diana asks me

I could refer her to you, and you could put her off on the plea of a confidential communication."

"You shall not laugh at my friend any more to me," she said. "She would not dream of asking you such a question,—at least I think not," she added, at his smile.

"Well?" he said, interrogatively. "I shall be frankness itself on any other subject."

"It isn't exactly a confession I am after," she replied. "It was this: I wanted to ask you if you had not at some time been a singer. That is blunt enough, is it not? Because I don't mean if you have sung *en amateur*, but——" she hesitated.

"If I have ever sung professionally?—for money? Is that it?"

"Yes," she said. "Do you mind my asking you the question?"

"Not in the least," he replied. "But before answering it, will you let me ask you what suggested the idea? There are three or four people who could have told you,—your husband among the number."

"No," she said. "My husband has never mentioned it. There is something about your voice, but particularly in the way you use it, that suggested the idea to me ; and I wanted to know if I was right, —out of sheer curiosity, let us say."

"You were right," he said, looking thoughtfully into the fire ; "I was for a while a professional singer,—that is, I 'got my living,' as the saying is, by my voice,—but it was not for a very long time ; and though I sang more or less in concerts and in oratorio, I hardly had more than a brief local reputation, and, as I appeared on programmes under another name than my own, there are, as I said, only three or four people who would be likely to remember."

"It was a good many years ago ; and you gave it up altogether?" she asked.

"Singing in public, yes," he replied ; "but in a desultory way I have been in the habit of keeping up my practice with voice-teachers, in Italy and London, as I had opportunity and inclination. I hardly know why," he added, reflectively. "For


memory's sake, perhaps ; my brief career had many pleasant things in it,—but my mind holds tenderly to many more rather sad ones."

He turned towards his companion as he finished his sentence. She was looking at him expectantly, and with an impression of sympathetic interest.

"Will you not tell me more?" she asked.

"There isn't much to the story," he replied, "and what there is is commonplace enough.

"My wife and I were in New York, and we were very poor,—pretty well in straits. An enterprise which had brought us here from the interior town where we had lived had broken down completely, and left every one connected with it, except some of the higher officials, utterly in the lurch. After some time of ineffectual endeavor to get something—anything—in the way of employment, we had gone into very cheap lodgings, one room, in fact, and we were living on as little as would



keep body and soul together. The little money we had from my wife's not very extensive collection of trinkets, and my own watch and chain, was dribbling away in dimes and quarters, and it had got to be a question of weeks only when our clothes would go to the pawn-shop. We had managed to pull along through the winter to the time when the regular annual shifting about takes place in the various church choirs.

"It was my wife's suggestion. We were sitting together one Sunday afternoon. She was an enthusiastic church-woman, and had been to morning service alone. I asked her some rather uninterested questions about the service and the music, when she said, suddenly, 'Jack, I have an idea ; this is the time of year when they make changes in choirs. Why don't you try to get a place to sing? You have had a good experience ; you have been well taught, and your voice is as good as most of them, I believe. I think it better than any that I've heard.'

“‘Thank you, my dear,’ I said to her. ‘You have an idea truly ; but the chances of a stranger like me, notwithstanding my transcendent merits, getting a foothold among a lot of the most jealous people in the world, are simply zero.’

“‘Even a hearing would be more than I could possibly expect, to say nothing else.’

“‘You might try, anyway,’ she urged.

“‘Yes,’ I said, ‘I could put my name on the list at a musical agency ; but if there should be any preliminary fee,—if it were not more than a dollar,—I should not feel as if the chance justified it. And what should I do for references or recommendations? And if I got a hearing, these things go largely by personal influence and favor,—my stock of which is, if anything, lower than our funds.’

“‘I don’t care,’ she persisted ; ‘I have a feeling that if you try you will succeed.’

“It seemed a perfectly hopeless venture to me ; but she at last contrived to inspire me with a breath of her hopefulness, and

the next morning I went to an agency and registered my name, giving such particulars as were called for by the clerk, who, in answer to my query as to the chances of success under the circumstances, gave his shoulders a shrug, and said that I might get a place in Morristown or Williamsburg, or some of those towns ; but the city churches usually confined their selections to singers with a metropolitan reputation, — ‘mostly swap around among the same crowd’ was about the way he put it.

“I am by way of making a long story of it after all,” said Strathmore.

“I hope there is a great deal more of it,” said Mrs. Courtlandt. “I am very much interested. Do go on. Of course I know that you succeeded ; but I can understand that it must have seemed cruelly hopeless.”

“It did indeed,” he answered ; “and it was, after all, by mere chance that I got a trial.

“As I was leaving the place I came face to face with the organist of a church in my

native town, with whom I had sung some years and had been very friendly with. My first impulse was to conceal, or rather not to reveal, my errand there ; but it occurred to me that he might be of use, and I could not afford to forego any advantage.

"After our greeting and mutual inquiries, I said, 'I suppose the usual errand,—looking for a tenor?'

"'Quite right,' he replied ; 'and I'd be looking for a bass too, old man, if I could get you back again.'

"'I wish some one in the city was bent on getting hold of me at a very large salary,' I said. 'You don't know of a wealthy church that is on the point of falling apart for want of such a fellow as I am, I suppose?'

"My friend hesitated a moment, and then said, 'Now, there's an odd thing. You've heard of Kay, the rich chap who runs the music at St. Andrew's Church?'

"'Yes,' I said, 'I have heard you speak of him.'

"'Well,' he went on, 'I know him quite

well, and I met him not half an hour ago in at Schirmer's, and he told me that there was going to be a turn over in the choir,—going to “fire” every one in the first quartette except the soprano. Kay's a funny old chap, pays for a good share of the music, plays the organ, and pretty well runs the whole shop. They have a music committee and all that, but what he says goes. Trouble is, that it's considered the best place in New York, and every man will make a try for it.'

“He stopped a minute and looked down seemingly at my boots, which——” and the speaker looked whimsically at the varnished leather he was wearing. Mrs. Courtlandt's eyes unconsciously following his own, which told their own story. “Presently he looked up—his name, by the way, was Beers, George Beers—and said, impulsively, ‘John, old man, you've come to grief. Yes, I know ; saw it in the papers. You want this place.’

“‘Yes,’ I said, ‘I have, rather, and I should be glad to earn the money.’

“ ‘Well,’ he exclaimed, ‘I can’t promise you the situation, of course ; but, by Jupiter Ammon ! you’re going to have a chance to try.’ I am quoting my friend pretty literally, Mrs. Courtlandt.”

“I like your friend immensely,” she said. “Pray be as literal as possible. He is charming !”

“I said, ‘That’s as much as I could possibly hope for,’ ” resumed Strathmore.

“George stood for a moment biting thoughtfully at the ends of his moustache, and then exclaimed, ‘I don’t know about that. It’ll all depend on Kay. If he happens to take a shine to you it will be all right ; but you’ll *have to sing*, and don’t you *forget it !*’

“ ‘Do you think I could do the work ?’ I asked.

“He put his hands on my shoulders and gave me a little shake. ‘I know,’ he said, ‘about all those fellows who are likely to compete, and if you’ll sing for Kay as you used to sing for me sometimes,—not always, you know, but as you can,—there

isn't one of them can touch you. Just you put your heart and the muscles of your diaphragm into it, and you'll do. I must be off now, but I'll see Kay before I leave the city to-morrow, and I'll speak a parable unto him !' And off he went before I could say more than a word of thanks."

"I should like to know Mr. Beers," said Mrs. Courtlandt. "Where is he?"

"Where there are plenty of good fellows and good music, I hope and trust," replied Strathmore. "He would not be happy else."

"He is——" she asked.

"Yes," said Strathmore, "ten years ago."

"Oh, what a pity!" she exclaimed.

"I don't know," he rejoined, quietly.

"Will you tell me the rest?" she said, softly. "Did you hear from Mr. Kay?"

"Yes," he resumed. "I had told George to give him my address at the agency, and two days after I found a note from Kay making an appointment for the

day following at four o'clock at the church ; and to make a long story short——”

“I will not have you make a short story shorter,” she broke in. “What did your wife say?”

“I did not say anything of my meeting with Beers, except that I had seen him and to give her his compliments,” he replied, “until the day of the appointment, and then I told her all.”

“And then?” asked Mrs. Courtlandt.

“She looked upon the matter as settled, or pretended to, and proceeded to lay out my programme. I must have a good hearty luncheon at one o'clock. ‘You haven’t eaten any meat for days,’ she said, which was true. ‘There should be a large, lean chop, and no vegetables,—bread only,—except a bit of salad afterwards, and I should have two glasses of sherry. She would not go with me. She had planned her own luncheon, and would not go to the church.’

“If, as you say, you insist upon the details,” continued Strathmore, “I may relate

that I followed her injunction, and that the meat and the wine, and a glimmer of hope withal, put heart in me, the like of which I had not known for a long time ; and I remember, as I walked across and up-town to the church, I was in a curious state of what I can only call felicity.

“I had been directed to go into the church by a side door, and on entering was approached by a grave elderly person, who asked if I came by appointment, and my name. I gave him a pencilled card and sat down in one of the pews. I was, in my impatience, somewhat in advance of the appointed time ; but I noticed a group of three men at the front of the church, and heard a murmuring of voices from the old-fashioned high choir gallery at the rear.

“As I sat waiting I began to realize the ordeal before me, and I could feel the courage with which I had approached it giving way to a sinking feeling of apprehension. My impulse was to run away. By and by, after an interval of perhaps ten

minutes, but which seemed interminable to me, the organ sounded a prelude, and a beautiful contralto voice came brooding down into the church.

“The song was followed by another not quite so pleasing. I don’t remember what, and I heard a hard voice say, ‘That will do, Miss Craig ; that will do. Now, Mr. Arden, if you please ;’ and presently a fine, a very fine bass voice filled the church with sound and me with dismay, for it was very good indeed. My impulse to run away amounted almost to a determination, but after a dozen measures or so the organ suddenly stopped, and I heard the hard voice say, ‘That note is D sharp, Mr. Arden,—not D natural ; won’t you kindly repeat the phrase?’

“Just as the singer began the repetition the attendant said to me, ‘You are to come next, sir,’ and in a moment more the organ stopped again. There was more trouble about the accidental.

“‘You sang D natural again, Mr. Arden. Have you, may I ask, any spe-

cial antipathy to D sharp? or isn't it in your voice?"

"‘I am sure that I sang it D sharp, Mr. Kay,’ protested the singer.

"‘Not unless I have a thickening of the ear-drum,’ retorted the voice,—‘go on,’ and at the end I heard it say, ‘That’s all, thank you, Mr. Arden. That’s all!’

"‘Heavens!’ I said to myself. ‘What sort of a Tartar is this! I shall get my labor for my pains, and nothing else.’

"As I passed down the side-aisle after the attendant, I noticed a number of young men and women in the back seats talking in low tones, with the usual amount of giggling laughter. They were members of the chorus who had come in to hear the singers,—as I divined,—and I caught their looks of curious interest as I passed.

"When I entered the choir-loft, the only persons there were a handsome demi-brunette woman, who looked to be perhaps seven-and-twenty, very fashionably dressed, and seemingly on perfect

terms with herself, and a short, square-shouldered man past middle age, with very sharp, dark eyes, thick gray hair and moustache.

“She looked me over with a calm and superior air, and he eyed me sharply under his irritable shaggy brows.

“‘You’re Mr. Armstrong?’ he said.

“‘Armstrong is the name I left at the office,’ I said, ‘and it’s a family name, but I have thought better of it; my name is Strathmore.’

“‘H-m-m!’ he grunted; ‘let me present you to Miss Lindsay, Mr. Strathmore. Are you a connection of Wilson Armstrong’s?’

“‘He is a distant cousin of mine,’ I replied.

“‘Used to know him years ago,’ he remarked, pursing out his lips; and, after a moment, he said, ‘Beers spoke to me about you,—said you could sing. Have you brought anything with you?’

“‘No,’ I replied, ‘I have brought nothing with me.’

“‘Thought you could sing anything I would give you, I suppose,’ he remarked.

“‘No,’ I said; ‘but I fancied that in a choir like yours one would be often confronted with some unexpected thing, and I thought I might as well take my chance. As for singing anything, as you say, I may remark that I heard Mr. Arden’s experience, and——’

“‘Arden’s an ass,’ he blurted out. ‘You’d better begin with something you know. Do you know the Elijah?’

“‘Yes,’ I answered.

“‘Very well,’ he said, ‘let us try “It is enough.”’

“Kay’s brusque, blunt manner, under which I suspected a vein of kindly humor, had somewhat steadied rather than disconcerted me, but my heart was beating hard and fast, and there was a tight feeling in my throat, as if no sound could be gotten out of it.


“Kay handed me a copy of the Elijah and began the introduction.

“The choir gallery was lighted with the

shadows of the early spring afternoon. I could faintly see the group in front, the committee which was to pass upon my efforts.

“I sang the first few measures almost unconsciously, with a host of irrelevant thoughts passing through my mind, but all at once I was recalled to myself by the sound of my own voice, and realized that I was in condition to do my best,—was doing it, in fact.

“I was thoroughly familiar with the composition, and nothing could have been chosen better suited to my mood at the time. As I sang I felt in myself all the passion and despair which it expresses so affectingly, and yet with a sensation of exalted pleasure, which was almost ecstatic. It seemed to me that never had I had every note and tone in my voice so completely at command, and I could feel it go out and fill the church with a sense of power which, in my overwrought state of nervous excitement, fairly intoxicated me. When I had finished I turned to—



wards Kay. He played the last chords softly and lingeringly, and turned his face towards Miss Lindsay with an interrogative lift of his brows. She nodded a response without speaking.

"There was a silence of some moments. Kay was fumbling over some music on the rack. I was wondering what would come next.

"Miss Lindsay was watching Kay with an expression which gave me the idea that he was about to do some odd thing.

"Presently he got off the organ bench, and going to a shelf, fetched some sheets of manuscript, one of which he handed to me. At first glance it looked like nothing but a 'tangle of intemperate scratches' and blots, but closer inspection showed it to be a vocal score of his own composition, written in the bass clef, full of accidentals, and with what seemed an utter disregard of all methods of spacing and the like.

"'There's something for you to read,' he said, without looking at me, and seat-

ing himself, began to play the prelude, which, fortunately for me, contained a measure or two of the theme. Ordinarily it would have puzzled me sorely, but I suppose my faculties were on their keenest edge. At any rate, I read it through without a blunder and, catching the idea of the composition, managed to give it some expression.

"It ended in the key of B flat major, I remember, and I sang the last F and the tonic below the staff.

"After I had finished, Kay sounded the last note two or three times with his fat forefinger, looking at me with a frown. 'What business have you with that last note?' he exclaimed at last.

"'I beg your pardon,' said I, 'I suppose I ought to have sung it as you wrote it.'

"'I didn't mean that,' he said, 'though you ought certainly to have sung it as it was written unless I told you otherwise. What I meant was, that with your upper voice you haven't any proper right to low B flat.'

“‘Did it sound forced or out of tune?’ I asked.

“‘No, it didn’t!’ he snapped out. ‘Only you’ve no business to have it.’

“He turned his back to me again, and seemed to be absently scanning the pages of his preposterous manuscript.

“‘Am I to sing anything more?’ I ventured to ask at last.

“‘Eh? What?’ he ejaculated. ‘Oh, yes, if you feel like it, suppose we go over the last thing again. See here a minute.’ And he pointed out one or two places in the score and gave me his ideas.

“The composition was really charming, and with more familiarity I sang it with more freedom of voice and expression, and with much enjoyment. He made no comment at all. Just then the attendant came in and said,—

“‘The committee would like to speak with you, Mr. Kay.’

“‘All right,’ he replied, moving to the door. ‘You wait here, please,’ to me.

“‘I think I will go down-stairs,’ said

Miss Lindsay. 'I hope we shall get on together.' She rose and put out her hand with a smile.

"'You are very kind,' I said, 'but I don't quite understand——'

"'I mean,' she said, 'to congratulate you. The thing is settled. I know Mr. Kay so well. You have satisfied him completely, and he was perfectly delighted with your singing of his own composition. Nothing will prevent him from getting you here. Indeed,' she said, 'I have to thank you for a great pleasure myself, and I'm going to pay you in part by a hint. Don't be too modest about the money part. He won't like you any better, and what the church does not appropriate he will gladly pay himself rather than lose you. Good-by.' And presently I saw her join Kay and the other men in the front of the church."

"I like Miss Lindsay very much," said Mrs. Courtlandt. "Did you get on with her?"

"Yes," said Strathmore. "We became

excellent friends. She was an admirable woman and a superb singer."

"Do you know about her now?" asked Mrs. Courtlandt.

"Yes," he replied; "she married about two years after the time I first met her. She lives in the city. You may know of her by name at least. Her husband's name is Emering."

"I do know her slightly," said Mrs. Courtlandt; "that is to say, I have met her, but I never heard of her as a singer."

"No," he said; "you would not be very likely to. She gave up singing in public when she married. . . ."

"Now you are going to finish your story," said Mrs. Courtlandt, settling back in her chair with her eyes on his face.

"Very well," he replied, "if you care to have me. There isn't much more of it."

"A few minutes after Miss Lindsay's departure Kay came back, and seating himself sideways on the organ bench,

stared at me for a minute or two in silence, taking me all in from my face to my shabby boots.

"At last he said, abruptly, 'Who taught you to sing?'

"'R—— for the most part,' I replied.

"'How was that?' he asked, looking sharply at me. 'He was never located in New York.'

"'No,' I said. 'He came to my native town and stayed there two years. I had a daily lesson from him during that time.'

"'H-m-m!' he said. 'You've been well taught. R—— is a first-rate teacher when he takes an interest in a pupil, but he is the most thorough-paced—— Well, let's get to business. Your singing is satisfactory, and the committee'—here he grinned sardonically—'like your voice. I'm going to offer you twelve hundred dollars, will that do?'

"It took my breath away, but I managed to say, without changing countenance, that I supposed that was the regular stipend.

“‘No, it isn’t,’ he said, turning his face towards the organ, and adding with a chuckle, ‘You must remember that you are a beginner.’

“He shut the organ, put on his coat, and said, ‘If you are going down the avenue, come along.’

“We walked in silence for a block or two, and then he said, ‘Been in the city long? What have you been at? You don’t look very prosperous.’

“I answered his questions.

“‘Married?’

“I said, ‘Yes.’

“‘Wife a singer?’

“‘She has a pretty voice,’ I replied, ‘and reads well; but not much training.’

“In such ways he had elicited by jerks, as it were, a pretty good outline of my history and prospects, and we had come opposite the Albemarle Hotel.

“‘Just step in here with me for a minute,’ he said. ‘Would you like a cocktail?’

“I told him I did not drink spirits.

“‘That’s right,’ he remarked, with a nod ; ‘bad for the voice.’

“He stepped up to the clerk’s desk, and taking a cheque from his pocket-book, filled it out, and pushed it along to me, face down. ‘Endorse that,’ he ordered ; and to my look of inquiry, ‘Put your name on it.’ I did so.

“‘George,’ he said to the clerk, ‘ask the cashier to cash that,’ and presently he handed me a package of clean notes. ‘There’s a hundred,’ he said ; ‘will that carry you along? You’ll be paid monthly for the first three months, and after that every quarter. That’s all right,’ waiving my thanks. ‘That’s all right! Good-night!’ And off he hurried.”

“I’m not sure that I do not like Mr. Kay best of all,” said Mrs. Courtlandt. “Did you get on with him?”

“Yes,” said Strathmore. “He befriended me in every way. I soon began to get through him more or less concert engagements, and eventually a business engagement which did not interfere with

my musical work, and added comfortably to my income. We have kept up a cordial friendship ever since. At the expiration of a couple of years there came a change in my affairs which enabled me to give up the singing, and—that is the story.”

“No,” she said, “that isn’t quite the whole of it. Your wife must have been so glad. What did she say? She knew you would be successful.”

“I don’t think,” replied Strathmore, after a pause, and lowering his tone a little, “that she was quite so sanguine as she professed. It was a very white and nervous face that confronted me when I entered our lodging. But she saw instantly that my news was good.”

“What did she say?” asked Mrs. Courtlandt, softly. “Do you remember?”

“Yes,” he replied, with a little tremble in his voice, “I remember, she said ‘John ! John ! John !’ and then she put her arms about my neck and cried as if her heart

were breaking. When she was composed, I took the money from my pocket and laid it in her lap and said to her, 'Help yourself.'

" 'May I?' she asked.

" 'Help yourself,' I said; 'we're rich, and there is more where that came from.'

"And now my story is finished. You have led me on to talk a great deal about myself, and very egotistically, I am afraid."

"I think you have told it extremely well, and I have been very much interested," she said, warmly. "But now I want something more. Am I very importunate?"

"I am too much flattered to admit of such a thought," he replied. "What is it?"

"I want to hear you sing," she said.

"Now?" he asked. He had noticed a small upright piano and a shelf-stand piled with music at one side of the room when he entered.

"If you will," she replied.

"Will you play for me?" he asked.

"If I'm not too nervous," she said ; "if I can. I play for Ernest when he has an impulse to sing, which, for the last two years or so, has been rare. I have nothing here but his music,—mostly ballads. Perhaps you can find something. Are ballads beneath your dignity?"

He smiled, and said, as he turned over the music on the stand while she sat at the piano, "You must not think that I am an accomplished musician or very advanced in my ideas. I used to be a singer, but that is about all ; and I am sometimes inclined to think that people humbug themselves a good deal about music. There is a vast deal of it that is very beautiful that was not written by Wagner, or Bach, or Beethoven, for that matter. I know it is the fashion to disparage Mendelssohn, not to think much of Gounod, and, I may ask, how many people are familiar with Robert Franz, some of whose songs are here, I see,—to my mind one of the most exquisite song-writers that ever lived. Ah, here is something I like, this song of Lassen's :

‘Mein Hertz ist wie die Dunkel Nacht.’
Shall we begin it with this?”

“Let me run it through once,” she said.
“Ernest and I have never made much of it. It’s not easy.”

“There is a certain swing to the rhythm,” he said, indicating it to her as she played.

She gave a little start and pressed her lips together as his voice filled the room ; frowned as she made a small stumble in her part.

The song is short, and at the end she said quickly, without raising her eyes,
“Will you kindly sing it again?”

The second time he saw that she fully comprehended the composition, and that he might sing as he pleased, which he did, bringing out the full meaning of the song. When he finished she turned and looked up into his face with a seeming unconsciousness of her act, and with an expression of wonderment.

A faint smile came into his eyes as he returned her look, and she turned her

face to the piano, saying, as if to herself, "What a voice!"

"Do you like this?" he asked, handing her Rubinstein's "Du bist wie Eine Blume."

Her hand trembled a little as she placed the music in the rack and opened it.

"I hardly know," she replied. "Ernest heard it sung somewhere and brought it to me; but though it is very unlike 'Mein Hertz,' we had much the same experience with it. We did not make much of it."

"I am very fond of it," he said. "Of all the settings of the poem I prefer this one, though Listz, Thomas, Helmund, and many others have written for it. Shall we try it?"

"Forgive me," he interrupted, as she played the opening measures. "It's common time. It tempts one always into triple time at first; but to employ that deprives the composition of one of its most fascinating characteristics. Let us hum it through once, and then sing it in earnest."

"Oh, what an exquisite thing!" she exclaimed, as he finished.

"Yes," he replied; "it is the very essence of tenderness without a hint of passion. The song is like unto a flower itself."

"I wish I could play for you better," she said; "but really one reason I did not was because I was trying to listen too much."

"You did extremely well," he replied. "You have the first essential requirement for an accompanist,—sympathetic intelligence,—and I'm sure we should get on perfectly."

"It is a pleasure," she said; "but I want to be able to listen to you more,—to hear you sing with some one who can do you justice, and in a larger place. I want to hear all of your voice. How can I manage it?"

"You might let me bring Kay with me some time," said Strathmore. "I had a glimpse of a grand piano in the drawing-room."

"Oh, yes," she replied, "there is a grand. Do you think Mr. Kay would come?"

"I haven't the smallest doubt of it," he replied, "if I tell him you wish to make his acquaintance. He is a very gallant old bachelor. If I should ask him for next Thursday, would that be agreeable to you?"

"Indeed it would, and I hope to see you both," she said, as he rose to go.

CHAPTER X.

“O hour, of all hours, the most blessed upon earth,
Blessed hour of our dinners !”

THE morning after Mr. Strathmore's call upon Mrs. Courtlandt he sent a note to Mr. Kay asking him to dine with him that evening. He ordered the dinner with careful reference to his old friend's tastes, for Kay loved good eating and drinking pretty nearly as well as he did music.

Mr. Kay arrived punctually, for he rightly regarded his healthy appetite as one of his choicest possessions.

Their talk was desultory during the repast, and was, in fact, chiefly about the dinner, which met the elder man's critical approval, and to which he did ample justice. It was his expressed opinion that nothing so well showed one to be a man of the world as his ability to arrange a *menu*.

It was after coffee and the lighting of tobacco. Strathmore pushed the decanter of red wine over to his friend, who said, "Aren't you going to take any? No? Well, I think you may be right, but this is too good to be neglected. It's really a pity to smoke with it." He filled his glass, lifted it to his nose, and then very slowly drank half its contents. Putting it down upon the table he stared at it a moment, and then, looking up with the frown and twinkle which were characteristic, he said, "Well, you've given me a capital dinner, —going to give me anything else?"

"Yes," said Strathmore, "I'm going to give you a great advantage. You are going to be presented to a very charming woman, who is anxious to make your acquaintance, having heard of your attractions and the graces of your conversation."

"The deuce I am, and the devil she is!" said Kay, frowning at the speaker.

"Yes, you are going to call at her house next Thursday evening at nine o'clock."

Kay glared at Strathmore for a moment

with an expression of amazement, and then said, with a snort of measureless contempt, "Oh, on Thursday next at nine o'clock I am not to have my dinner in peace ; I'm not to have my rubber at the club,—I'm going to bring on an indigestion and forego all my usual comforts and pleasures for the sake of going to some woman's house whom I don't know, and don't want to, and there sit for an hour or two. Is that about the size of it?"

"Stated with your usual terseness and vigor," said Strathmore.

"And the most extraordinary part of it is, that this lunatic proposition should come from you," Kay continued. "You've cajoled me out of some things in your time, young man, but *this* is no go."

"Well, you see," said Strathmore, "I answered for you,—my word is at stake."

"Hang you and your word !" cried Kay. "What are you up to, anyway ? Because you are prepared in some way that I don't fathom to make an ass of yourself, I don't

in the least intend to help you draw the cart."

"Oh, and by the way," said Strathmore, "there's one thing I forgot to mention: you are going to play."

Kay stared at the speaker. "Well, I *am* damned!" he said at last, rising from his chair. "*Damned* if I'm not."

"Isn't that rather a *non sequitur*?" asked the other. "What are you getting up for? There's three parts of the 'Moreton' left, and I have a lot more to tell you."

Kay looked at him with a furious frown, but Strathmore saw a twitching in the corner of his mouth, and joined in the laugh which ensued.

"What are you driving at, anyway?" Kay said, as he resumed his seat.

"Well, my friend," said Strathmore, "I was calling upon Mrs. Courtlandt one evening recently, and happened to mention some events in my early days in New York. In fact, she was good enough to seem interested, and I gave her an outline of my brief career as a singer. Natu-

rally I spoke of you. One thing led to another, and she finally asked me to sing for her."

Kay looked sharply at his companion. "Did you?" he said.

"Yes," said Strathmore, without looking up. "She played for me, and after we had finished she expressed a wish to hear me with some one else playing. I said to her that you, whom she had said she would like to meet, would, I thought, play for me some time. That is all there is of it."

The two men sat for a while smoking in silence, Kay occasionally looking up from under his beetling brows in a puzzled sort of way. Finally Strathmore said, "Well?"

"Oh, I suppose so," Kay assented. "As you are pleased to say I am such a gallant old gentleman, with such engaging manners, et cetera, I suppose I shall have to give in ; though what for I'm hanged if I know. And you, too, how many times have you ever done this thing? Once? twice? three times? No, sir! You never did it in your life, did you?"

"Shall I call for you Thursday night?" said Strathmore, as Kay rose to go.

"Afraid I won't show up, eh? No, I'll go, just to make your word good."

Kay went in the direction of his club. "Heigh-ho," he said to himself, "how the time goes! I'm getting to be an old man, and I drink too much. Ten years! I declare I'm anxious to hear his voice again. How fond I was of him! Curious! Courtlandt? Yes, I've seen her. A stately woman. I wonder—humph! humph!"

CHAPTER XII.

“O how wonderful is the human voice !
It is indeed the organ of the soul !”

FEARING that his unconventional friend might, in his desire to have the evening over, call upon Mrs. Courtlandt before the usual time, Mr. Strathmore entered her drawing-room quite early. There was no one in the room, and he felt for the first time the rather unusual attitude he was assuming, his taking for granted Mrs. Courtlandt's almost personal interest in himself. Before he had quite recovered his mental pose she entered.

“It is good of you to come,” she said, “but I fear your old friend did not look upon our scheme with favor ; still, you see the lights are arranged for him.” In the pause of an instant he had noticed that she was all in gray to the point of her satin slipper.

"Indeed he did, my dear Mrs. Courtlandt; he will be here directly. In fact, I think I hear his brusque tone already," said Strathmore, as "Mr. Kay" was announced.

Mrs. Courtlandt greeted the old musician cordially, saying how much Mr. Courtlandt regretted that a previous engagement prevented his listening to the music.

He seated himself at the piano and ran his fingers over the keys. At first he played a composition of his own, a lovely theme carried through several modulations, and then began Chopin's Nocturne in G. The sweetest and most hopeless of all his beautiful music.

Mrs. Courtlandt had chosen a seat at the far end of the room, quite in the dim light. She seemed unconscious of any presence save her own and the musician at the piano.

After a little pause, Mr. Kay said, "Where's your music, John? I thought I was to play for you to sing."

"You are giving me a great deal of

pleasure as it is," said Mrs. Courtlandt ;
"but I shall be very glad to hear Mr.
Strathmore sing."

Mr. Kay took the music Strathmore had brought with him, and looking it through chose one, handing a copy to Strathmore. The singer stood motionless during the prelude, half leaning against the piano, his face slightly turned towards the accompanist. At the concluding chord of Schubert's "Wanderer" he turned, with his hand resting on the instrument.

He sang the first movement quietly, but the voice, like a cello, seemed to vibrate in every part of the room as the song proceeded, and particularly in the passionate presto passage it filled the room as if the whole space was vibrating like a sounding-board.

Without speaking, Strathmore took a song from the pile and gave it to Mr. Kay. It was Riedel's setting of "The Abschiedlied," from "Der Trompeter von Säckingen." As the singer repeated for the last time, "es hat nicht sollen sein,"

Mrs. Courtlandt drew a long, hard breath and came to the piano.

Ignoring Strathmore, she turned to Mr. Kay and said, "You have given me more pleasure than I can say, Mr. Kay. Will you come some time when I am quite alone and play to me?"

"I shall be very glad to, Mrs. Courtlandt," he replied, "and I am delighted to find that all this knocking around has not ruined John's voice. Such an instrument deserves a little care." Rising from the piano, he said, "I am sorry to go so soon, but except for my promise and," turning laughingly to Strathmore, "for making my word good, I should have failed you to-night. An old friend is in town and is now at the club waiting for me. You will let me come again, will you not, Mrs. Courtlandt?"

"It will give me pleasure to see you often, Mr. Kay, and I want to thank you so much for this evening."

Strathmore walked to the door with his old friend and then came back to the piano.

"Won't you sing once more before you go?" asked Beatrice.

"Gladly," he assented; "what shall it be?"

She rose and looked through his music, and at last stopped hesitatingly, then held a song out to him. "You care for Franz's songs, will you sing 'Parting'?"

He let her play through the first verse.

"Sing the English words," she said.

He sang the three verses of the first part with all the sorrowful tenderness of parting which inspires them. The fourth and last with the exultant passion of meeting, letting his voice go to nearly its full power, and carried almost beyond himself for the moment by the spell of the music and the presence of the beautiful woman at his side. He broke the silence.—"Good-night."

There were tears in her eyes as she lifted them to his face. She gave him her hand as she returned his "good-night," and with an overwhelming impulse he raised it to his lips and kissed it.

CHAPTER XIII.

“ I will not soil thy purple with my dust,
Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice glass,
Nor give thee any love which were unjust.
Beloved, I only love thee ! let it pass.”

HE raised her hand to his lips and went quickly out of the house. The night was cloudy and quite still, and though it was not late it seemed to him there was no sight nor sound of passing. There might have been both without his sense of either, for he had for the moment no objective consciousness at all. Nothing appeared to him but the look in her face and the timid pull of her hand when his lips were still upon it. He stood a moment in front of the house as if bewildered about his direction, and then slowly, and as one thought checked another in his mind, haltingly, started clubward or homeward, as


might be. As he opened his match-box he found that there were but two wax vestas, but before he touched the lighted one to his cigar he watched it burn to his finger-tips ; and then realizing the supreme importance of the other and last one, with an amused recollection of the belief of all smokers that the lighting of a last match will break the dearest calm, he concentrated all his faculties for the moment, and set a light to the tobacco. So the trivial things come in among and upon the momentous ones with a very impudence.

What had happened? Everything? Nothing?

He had given way to an impulse that had come too suddenly upon him to be resisted, and the significance of his kiss was a revelation greater to him, perhaps, even than to her.

Was it the beginning or the end? If the one, of what? If the other, then again, of what? Did he love this woman whose presence was so agreeable to him,—had, indeed, grown so delightful to him that it

was happiness enough just to be near her? Was it love that made her face so perfect; her every motion so full of grace; her voice so sweet; that made her every attribute and quality combine into the sublimed essence of loveliness to him? He had never asked himself till now. He would have said that he had passed the point when such a thing was possible for him, if, indeed, as he sometimes wondered, it had ever been possible. Love, in its full meaning, had never quite come to him. He had known many women who had attracted him, but not passionately. Of his wife he had been devotedly and truly fond, and who had no fault in his eyes; and yet his marriage, it may be said, had prevented his knowledge of what love in its completest sense could mean to a man, and had left him, without his realizing it, with his susceptibilities unroused. And now he found himself, to his dismay, confronted, as it were, with a side of himself he had never known,—making demands which must be met either by repudiation



or payment. It was characteristic of the man,—not at first to ask himself if she loved him, but if he loved her. In truth, that she might greatly care for him would have seemed to him, had he thought of it, unlikely,—impossible. True love is very humble, and the oft-recurring question between lovers, “Are you sure you love me?” is born of the feeling, not of doubt of the other, but of the one; that one should be good enough to hold and keep the inestimable thing; and as he recalled the few months of their intercourse, he could not comfort (or torment) himself with any word or look of hers to build a hope upon. He felt that he might be sure of her liking. He knew without vanity that he was more congenial to her than most, or any, of the men whom she habitually met,—her husband’s friends (and he could not help the after-thought which included her husband). Search his memory as he might, he found nothing to indicate that she had ever given him one smallest reason to believe that she did or might

care for him in the way of love. Why should she? he thought. A man not only not in his first youth, but well-nigh to the point of the "old age of youth," with hair more gray than brown, and with the lines and wrinkles that are the scars of the siege which most of us have to sustain. Happy are those few fortunate ones who conquer or die in one short campaign; happier, perhaps, than those whose career knows neither siege nor sortie. He was clever in a way, but not clever enough in any one way to mark out a path of endeavor; and yet the artistic side of his temperament had been strong enough to hold him off at times, when other men would have compassed what he had been trained to work for and to call success. What, then, had happened? Why was he reviewing and balancing up the account of his life, and taking stock, as it were, of what was left of it? It was because, a few months before, he had said something to a woman, or rather to himself, as a part of a conversation, which he did not think she would

understand, and had been met with a rejoinder so quick, and so subtly and comprehensively sympathetic, accompanied by a look, as he turned his eyes upon her in admiring pleasure (it lasted but a second), that he saw the gates of heaven open with the revelation of all time to him. It was because the months that followed had let him into her life, and, by degrees, had given him opportunity beyond the limitations of merely conventional allowings, and yet absolutely within the bounds of her pure and stately rule, to realize all that he had missed in his life ; and because, man-like, he could not be content with what he fed his soul upon, and needs must, in a moment of mad passion, venture all his heart's desire, knowing that it was sure to lose. As he walked on the tension of his mind relaxed a little. After all it was not much, just the touch of lips to a woman's hand. To most women it would have been nothing,—and with them nothing to him. Perhaps he was all wrong, after all ; perhaps he was taking a morbid view

of it. She was a woman of the world, and it was at the most a bit of gallantry to which she was not used from him. He would not go to her house, would not see her for a while, and everything would be as it had been. For the first time in his life a pang of angry jealousy took him by the throat and gnashed his teeth. He quickened his pace almost to a run. He had to go into his club for a light for his cigar, and when he opened his own door very much later he reflected rather sardonically that he had taken more of his club friends' wine and very much more of their money than he cared for, though usually unlucky at cards.

CHAPTER XIV.

“Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I forbore,
Thy touch upon the palm.”

THE following morning Strathmore found among his letters a note in a hand he knew, aside from the dainty cipher on the seal, but which had never written him anything except impersonally conventional messages. It read,—

“DEAR MR. STRATHMORE,—Mr. Cowen, whom you have met at our house and whom I remember that you liked, is in town and will be dining with us to-night. I hope you have no engagement and will be able to join us at seven o'clock.

“There will be no one else.

“Sincerely,

“BEATRICE COURTLANDT.

"P.S.—Whatever your engagements I shall be *sure* that you will come,—I am sure. I can trust you not to misunderstand this. I have something to say which must be said. I have never before asked anything of you, have I?

"B. C."

"DEAR MRS. COURTLANDT,—Thank you. I shall be delighted to meet Cowen again, and an invitation from you cancels all engagements *ipso facto*. Expect me at seven, and believe me,

"Faithfully yours,

"JOHN STRATHMORE."

On another sheet,—

"I must have been mad last night, but God help me. I am no saner this morning. I forgot myself then, and I know I am by way of forgetting myself now. You say you have something to say which *must* be said. Oh, my dear! my dear! don't say it. Don't say it,—the thing which must be said. It was such a little thing to do, and I will never offend again. I know you thought you had a friend, one whom you could trust even with yourself, and you are revolting against the man. But you do not know how sweet you are, and how—oh! let me say it once!—how much I love you—love you! so much, that if you can find the smallest place for me anywhere in your life I will expand to fill it. And if what must

be said is 'go,' I will go, even unto the uttermost parts of the earth. But will you let me kiss your hand once more before I go?"

The Courtlandts rarely dined alone. Ernest said a *tête-à-tête* dinner was rather of a bore after several years of married life.

This night there were only four, all good talkers, and Beatrice's rather unusual silence passed unnoticed. She was glad to leave them to their cigars, and drew her chair in front of the open fire in the library.

Her thoughts were in a chaotic state, and although she knew the inevitable result, she dreaded the interview. She looked very lovely in her white satin dinner gown. Everything was always so dainty about Beatrice. She was a woman of whom a clever man had said, "Mrs. Courtlandt is one who could never offend my taste."

The men did not linger long over their tobacco, and soon came into the library.

"Beatrice," said Ernest, "Mr. Cowen

is anxious to see the new athletic club, and if you will excuse us we will go right over,—John will stay and entertain you.” And with a few conventional last words, the two men left. As the street door closed, Beatrice turned and looked at Strathmore. As he began to speak she raised her hand.

“Wait,” she said, “there is something which *must* be said.” She hesitated a moment, then went on rapidly, “A friendship, I mean that which is called a Platonic friendship, is not possible between a man and a woman. Plato did not believe it,—he meant a friendship between a man and a youth. If there are in the world two people to whom such a friendship could be possible, you would find their natures so cold and unresponsive that they would absolutely repel each other. Is that a paradox? You know me well enough to see that I have that very unpleasant habit of analyzing motives, my own most of all, until I sometimes feel there is nothing good in the

world. I said you knew me,—I think you do,—but even *you* cannot realize what I mean when I say that I have gotten over all doubt of you,—that I believe in you,—and the greatest proof I can give is in saying to you to-night what I, from my stand-point, must say.” Again she hesitated. Strathmore had moved his chair so that he might face her. He was not young,—he was a man of the world. Many women had been his friends, but never until to-night had his hands grown cold and his lips trembled at the sight of a woman in her high-backed chair with her hands loosely clasped in her lap. “No,” she said, “our friendship must cease. We must go back to mere acquaintances, and if that cannot be, then to where we were a year ago.”

He started up and began pacing the floor.

“We must give up?” he said. “And why? What harm are we doing to others or to ourselves? I have never said to you until this morning in my note, nor

you to me, one word to which the whole world could not listen. I meant what I said, and am strong enough to keep any place you make for me."

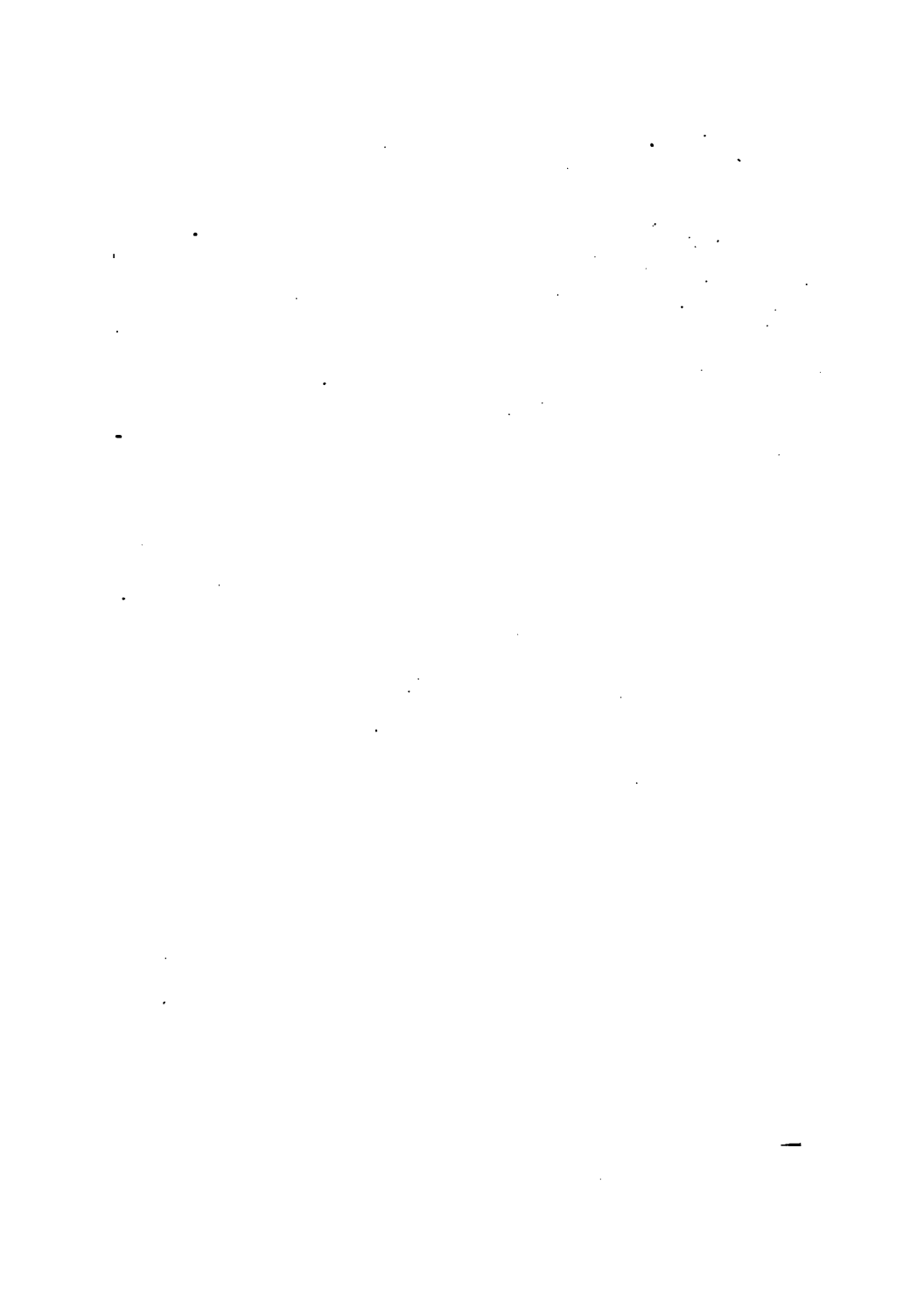
"I know," she said, wearily, "but to-night is the last of our friendship. Don't, don't make it so hard for me. Don't you understand? It *must* be."

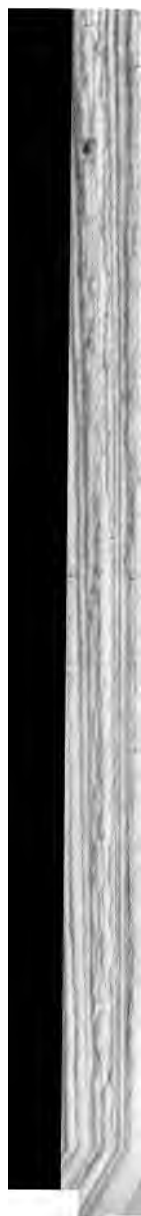
He came close to her. She rose, putting out both her hands. He clasped them close and kissed them. With a long look, as if to imprint her face upon his soul, and a low "God keep you everywhere," he went out into the night.

Not long afterwards the following notice was in the society column of one of the New York papers :

"It is to be regretted that Mr. John Strathmore sailed on the 'Paris' Wednesday last. He will make another tour of the world, and it is possible that he may remain in India, where he has large interests."

THE END.





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FATE AT THE DOOR



Allegro con brio

